



Operation Christmas Drop

US, Australia, Japan Drop Food, Toys on Pacific Islands

Cpl. Teome Matamua and Sgt. Phillip McIlvaney of the Australian Army 176th Air Dispatch Squadron loadmasters deliver a package to the island of Mog Mog in the Federated States of Micronesia as part of Operation Christmas Drop. Australian, Japanese and U.S. air force planes are dropping food and toys on remote atolls in the Pacific as part of the U.S. military's longest-running humanitarian relief mission.

(Staff Sgt. Katrina Brisbin/U.S. Air Force via AP)



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AUDREY McAVOY
Associated Press
HONOLULU (AP) —

Australian, Japanese and U.S. air force planes are dropping food and toys on remote atolls in the Pacific as part of the U.S. military's longest-running humanitarian relief mission. The packages will support 20,000 people across 56 islands in Micronesia, the Mariana Islands and Palau. The U.S. Air Force began the annual Operation Christmas Drop in 1952 when a Guam-based air crew noticed residents on the island of Kapingamarangi waving at them as they flew overhead. The crew gathered items they had

on the plane, attached a parachute and dropped them to the islanders. It's a feel-good mission that also helps the U.S. achieve political aims, namely deepening three-way cooperation with close allies Australia and Japan, who are first-time participants. Analysts say the U.S. has been boosting the trilateral relationship in recent years as it keeps an eye on China's growing military. The boxes include books, canned food and items like fishing nets that will help islanders maintain their largely subsistence lifestyle. This year, each package will also include a soccer ball. The planes fly low, look for a safe spot to

drop the bundles then release them from the back of the C-130s. University of Guam distance education staff use ham radios to talk to the islanders throughout the year and relay their needs. Japan and Australia each sent one C-130 to join three from the U.S.

U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Gregory Guillot, who is the director of strategic plans at Pacific Air Forces, said the Christmas Drop offers a good trilateral training opportunity, particularly in a time of budget constraints and busy units.

Guillot said the three air forces have been increasing their cooperation, noting they also come togeth-

er for the annual Cope North exercise on Guam and Red Flag drill in Alaska. Inviting Australia and Japan to Christmas Drop was a logical extension of other work the countries have been doing, Guillot said.

"Partnerships here in the Pacific are the key cornerstone in our strategy to maintain regional stability and prosperity. Japan and Australia share a common interest in that goal," Guillot said. Brad Glosserman, executive director of Pacific Forum think tank in Honolulu, said the three-way relationship is the "gold standard" for the U.S. military's strategy toward allies in the Pacific.

Climate deal: World praises France's diplomatic efforts

SYLVIE CORBET
Associated Press

LE BOURGET, France (AP) — Just a month after the Paris attacks, France has surmounted that atrocity to

planet level," Fabius said, visibly moved after coming out of the plenary room. France is seen as the inventor of the concept of modern diplomacy, and this

Canete said "France has united the world. This deal embodies the strength of the French nation." U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon praised Fabius'

conscious of the Copenhagen failure," Ibrahim said. In a unique gathering, 151 heads of state headed to Paris to give a political push on the first day of the conference — just over two weeks after attacks claimed by Islamic State killed 130 people in Paris. For more than a year, France had used its broad network of embassies — the third largest in the world — to work with governments abroad and keep them informed of the evolution of the negotiations.

French President Francois Hollande recalled that when he used to ask "where is Laurent Fabius" in the past year, he was answered: "he's in the plane because he's visiting all the countries of the world to build the agreement on climate." Hollande himself became committed to a cause he once barely gave importance to — he had almost ignored environmental issues during his electoral campaign four years ago. At every meeting with a foreign leader and during every visit abroad prior to the talks, Hollande remembered to mention the climate conference even when it was not front-page news.

During his visit to China last month, both countries released a strong joint agreement on climate they promoted as a signal to the world.

On Friday and Saturday, Hollande called several world leaders to help unlock the final sticking points. The French presidency re-

fused to give the list of who he called.

The diplomatic success is a welcome victory for the unpopular Socialist government, as it faces a tough electoral challenge from the far right and conservatives Sunday. And it is a boost for France's global image as the country's economic weight has shrunk in recent years.

French organizers said they took inspiration from ideas successfully tested in previous conferences, such as Durban, South Africa, in 2011. For instance, they decided to use informal meetings called "Indaba," from a Zulu word that means "gathering." They also closely worked with the Peruvian delegation following last year's Lima conference. During the Paris conference, France devoted a team of 60 to 80 permanent staff to follow every meeting, and coordinate and facilitate the talks for 24 hours a day.

When talks entered a difficult stage in the last few days, the French organizers became "very procedural" in order to avoid having last-minute snags, a French official said, describing a "laborious" process — and very little sleep. To solve tensions between specific countries, "We suggested they gather in small groups to try to find a compromise and we told them: 'come back in two hours with a proposal,'" the official said on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to disclose the details of the negotiations. □



French President Francois Hollande, right, French Foreign Minister and president of the COP21 Laurent Fabius, center, and United Nations Secretary General Ban ki-Moon applaud after the final conference at the COP21, the United Nations conference on climate change, in Le Bourget, north of Paris, Saturday, Dec. 12, 2015. Governments have adopted a global agreement that for the first time asks all countries to reduce or rein in their greenhouse gas emissions.

(AP Photo/Francois Mori)

help achieve a seemingly unachievable triumph: uniting the world to seal a global climate pact.

The Paris climate agreement, adopted on Saturday, was the culmination of more than a year of intense diplomatic efforts by France. Delegates and foreign dignitaries cheered Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, the host of the two-week talks, and gave him a standing ovation.

"It's rare in life to be able to move things forward at the

conference proved that the country is still a master of the art. Foreign officials highlighted Fabius' role in the success of the talks, heaping praise on him and France, which has a smaller diplomatic corps than the U.S. and China.

"You have done a superb job as everybody has said," U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry told Fabius on Saturday, expressing the Obama administration's "deepest gratitude to France."

EU climate chief Arias

"leadership." Maldives Foreign Minister Thoriq Ibrahim, who chairs the Alliance of Small Island States, said the French made several smart moves, including having world leaders come in at the beginning of the talks — not at the end like in Copenhagen.

The 2009 conference in Denmark, which failed to deliver a climate deal, was on the minds of all negotiators as the worst case scenario. "From the very beginning the French were

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Obama optimism over climate pact stalled by Republican opposition

KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry hailed the newly passed international climate change agreement as a major achievement that could help turn the tide on global warming, but got a quick reminder that Republicans will fight it all the way.

Obama said the climate agreement made Saturday night by almost 200 nations "can be a turning point for the world" and credited his administration for playing a key role. He and Kerry predicted it would prompt widespread spending on clean energy and help stem carbon pollution blamed for global warming.

"We've shown that the world has both the will and the ability to take on this challenge," Obama said from the White House. He said the climate agreement "offers the best chance we have to save the one planet we have."

"In short, this agreement will mean less of the carbon pollution that threatens our planet and more of the jobs and economic growth driven by low-carbon investments," Obama said.

Obama said the world leaders meeting in Paris "met the moment" and that people can be more confident "the planet will be in better shape for the next generation." Obama said the agreement is not perfect, but sets a framework that will contain periodic reviews and assessments to ensure that countries meet their commitments to curb carbon emissions.

The immediate reaction of leading Republican critics

was a stark reminder of the conflict that lies ahead.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Obama is "making promises he can't keep" and should remember that the agreement "is subject to being shredded in 13 months." McConnell noted that the presidential election is next year and the agreement could be reversed if the Republicans win the White House.

And Republican Sen. James Inhofe said that Americans can expect the administration to cite the agreement as an excuse for establishing emission targets for every sector of the U.S. economy.

Kerry said from Paris: "I have news for Senator Inhofe. The United States of America has already reduced its emissions more than any other country in the world."

"This has to happen," he said of the agreement. "I believe this will continue because I just personally cannot believe that any person who doesn't understand the science and isn't prepared to do for the next generation what we did here today and follow through on it cannot and will not be elected president of the United States."

In an interview taped for CBS' "Face the Nation," Kerry called the climate pact "a break-away agreement" that will change how countries make decisions and "spur massive investment."

He acknowledged that a Republican president could undo the agreement, but said there is already plenty of evidence that climate change is having a damaging and expensive impact with more intense storms, wildfires and melting glaciers. □



President Barack Obama speaks about the Paris climate agreement from the Cabinet Room of the White House in Washington, Saturday Dec 12, 2015.

(AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin)

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Revelers dressed in holiday-themed costumes sing as they participate in SantaCon in New York on Saturday, Dec. 12, 2015. Tracing its origins to a prankish, anti-consumerist gathering in San Francisco in 1994, SantaCon has mushroomed into events in hundreds of cities.

(AP Photo/Andres Kudacki)

Hundreds in costumes revel at SantaCon

JENNIFER PELTZ
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Santas came by the hundreds, reindeer formed a kick line and oversized elves cavorted with saucy Mrs. Clauses as a police helicopter circled overhead.

Welcome to SantaCon, the annual Christmastime costume-parade-meets-pub-crawl that was hoping this year would persuade New York it's more nice than naughty.

"Look out for your reindeer. Look out for your elves," organizers advised the crowd as Saturday's festivities began with a mix of safety messages and psyching-

up: "Can I get a 'ho'?!"

Before long, over a thousand costumed revelers were headed off to bar-hop and make merry through Brooklyn and Manhattan.

Jessica Carr and Victoria Pirolli had turned themselves into snow globes, each encasing her head and torso in bubble-umbrella-like plastic, with a foam rubber base around the hips. The two science teachers and friends from New Jersey said they were at their fifth SantaCon for the creativity, not the carousing that earned the event an out-of-control reputation in recent years.

"We have fun," Pirolli said. "We don't pee in bushes or anything."

Tracing its origins to a prankish, anti-consumerist gathering in San Francisco in 1994, SantaCon has mushroomed into events in hundreds of cities. New York's is generally the biggest, drawing thousands of people.

It's also drawn criticism, particularly after the 2012 and 2013 celebrations generated two arrests, 85 summonses for disorderly conduct and other offenses, and online videos of brawling St. Nicks. Organizers say there were no arrests or summonses last year. □

Jehovah's Witnesses could get \$1B for New York City property

KAREN MATTHEWS
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Jehovah's Witnesses, the door-knocking religious group that's been based in Brooklyn for a century, is selling its headquarters and other properties for an expected price tag of \$1 billion or more.

The Witnesses' move to a town about an hour north of New York City will likely mean the end of the complex's most well-known feature, the neon "Watchtower" sign advertising the church's flagship publication.

But it will free up hundreds of thousands of square feet for businesses and apartments in a now-trendy neighborhood at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge.

"It's going to be incredibly transformative," said Alexandria Sica, executive director of the DUMBO Improvement District, a business group.

Jehovah's Witnesses spokesman Richard Devine said the move will allow the organization to operate more efficiently. The church had owned 36 separate Brooklyn properties before it began selling them off in preparation for the move upstate to Warwick. The printing plant where the

Witnesses produce Bibles and religious tracts moved from Brooklyn to the town of Wallkill in 2004.

"As we've grown as an organization we've had to buy scattered properties wherever we could find them," Devine said.

"With a big, scattered campus like that it's challenging to administer and to maintain."

The Witnesses bought their 733,000-square-foot (68,100-sq. meter) headquarters from Squibb Pharmaceuticals for \$3 million in 1969. It was placed on the market this month along with a nearby apartment building and a 135,000-square-foot (12,540-sq. meter) lot. Despite the prominent "Watchtower" sign, the building has no historical designations that would place restrictions on the buyer.

The church has not announced an asking price but Tucker Reed, president of the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership, called \$1 billion "a conservative estimate" for the Witnesses' real estate portfolio.

A partnership including Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner purchased a nearby 1.4 million-square-foot (130,000-sq. □

Texas:

Mock mass shooting met by counter-demonstrators



Gun rights activist Jason Orsek holds a sign as he prepares for a march near the University of Texas, Saturday, Dec. 12, 2015, in Austin, Texas.

(AP Photo/Eric Gay)

JIM VERTUNO
Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — About a dozen gun rights activists staged a mock mass shooting near the University of Texas, only to be outnumbered by counter-demonstrators who waved sex toys and tried to drown

them out with chants. The groups Come and Take It Texas and Don't comply.com initially wanted to hold their event on campus Saturday but were told by school officials they would be charged with criminal trespassing. Several members openly carried real

assault-style rifles. The groups then slipped away to another location and "shot" six people with cardboard guns. Victims were outlined with chalk to show where they fell. After publicizing their event for nearly a week, organizers said they purposely avoided the crowds and media gathered to cover the event to prove that a shooter can strike anywhere and anytime. "In real (shooting) events like this, you don't know when they're going to happen, you don't know where they're going to happen ... we purposely did it that way," said Jason Orsek, vice president of both gun groups.

The campus is home to one of the worst mass shootings in U.S. history. Charles Whitman killed 16 people in 1966, shooting dozens of people from a perch atop the central clock tower. "It's tasteless," Robert Oxford, a graduate student and member of the group Gun-Free UT, said of the mock mass shooting. The Texas legislature this year voted to allow concealed handguns on college campuses, although public universities can establish gun-free zones. Plans under consideration for the Austin campus would prohibit firearms in dorms but allow them in classrooms. □

AP: US states expanded gun rights after school massacre

RYAN J. FOLEY
Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP) — The 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School, in which a mentally troubled young man killed 26 children and teachers, served as a rallying cry for gun-control advocates across the nation. But in the three years since, many states have moved in the opposite direction, embracing the National Rifle Association's axiom that more "good guys with guns" are needed to deter mass shootings. In Kansas, gun owners can now carry concealed weapons without obtaining a license. In Texas, those with permits will soon be able to carry openly in holsters and bring concealed weapons into some college classrooms. And in Arkansas, gun enthusiasts may be able to carry weapons into polling plac-

es next year when they vote for president. Dozens of new state laws have made it easier to obtain guns and carry them in more public places and made it harder for local governments to enact restrictions, according to a review of state legislation by The Associated Press. The number of guns manufactured and sold and the number of permits to carry concealed weapons have also increased, data show. The trend has been discouraging to some gun-control advocates, even as other states have adopted stricter background checks. Other gun-control supporters say their movement is emboldened by the recent rise of Everytown for Gun Safety, a well-funded group backed by former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg that is becoming influential in some state capitols. □

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Fewer Republicans think Bush can win general election

LONDONDERRY, New Hampshire (AP) —

The number of registered Republicans voters who think Jeb Bush could win the U.S. presidential election has plummeted, a new Associated Press-GfK poll finds, in the latest sign of trouble for the son and brother of former presidents once expected to become the front-runner for the Republican nomination.

The poll found that just 40 percent of registered Republicans think Bush could win the general election in November, down from 60 percent in October. Republicans are now no more likely than Democrats to see Bush as a potential general election winner.

Meanwhile, 39 percent say they view Bush unfavorably. That's almost the same percentage as billionaire front-runner Donald Trump, who has stunned the political world with an unorthodox campaign that has propelled



Republican presidential candidate and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush pauses as he is asked a question from the audience at the Sullivan Brothers Iowa Veterans Museum during a campaign stop in Waterloo, Iowa.

(Matthew Putney/The Courier via AP)

him to the top of Republican polls ahead of the primary contests that begin in February.

Bush is focusing his campaign on policy and his ability to govern success-

fully.

Perhaps even more troubling for Bush, given his insistence on talking about policy and his ability to govern, the poll found that GOP voters view Trump, the

real estate mogul and reality TV star, as more competent than the two-term governor of Florida.

After setbacks in October, including deep campaign spending cuts and a wide-

ly criticized debate performance, Bush sought to reassure donors who have contributed more than \$100 million to his campaign and a separate pro-Bush organization by resetting his effort with the auspicious slogan: "Jeb Can Fix It." Part of the shift in strategy was redoubling Bush's emphasis on New Hampshire, where aides said the candidate's serious style and affinity for one-on-one policy engagement was a close fit with New Englanders, who also typically hold themselves as independent of the national story line. New Hampshire is a key state because it holds its election early in the primary season.

Bush has held nearly 20 town hall-style meetings in the state, each with about 100 voters attending, including in places most other candidates have not visited. But the content of Bush's town halls remains the same, with him passing on Trump's flash and penchant for bombast to remain centered on telling the story of his time as governor and his detailed plans for the nation's economy and military.

He has faith — and some good-natured bullheadedness — that voters will eventually come around. "I'm not running for entertainer or anything like this. I hope you want a candidate who has actually thought it through, who actually has plans," he said while discussing the federal debt during one recent appearance. □

CNN:

Christie returns to main Republican presidential debate

WASHINGTON (AP) - CNN is inviting Gov. Chris Christie back to prime-time in the upcoming Republican presidential debate.

The New Jersey governor, who had been dropped from the main stage during the last debate, is one of nine Republican presidential candidates to qualify for the network's prime-time event on Tuesday.

Also among them: Ken-

tucky Sen.

Rand Paul, who was "on the bubble" of qualifying late last week, the network said.

Front-runner Donald Trump will appear at center stage, flanked by retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson and Sen. Ted Cruz, who is surging in Iowa.

Other Republican hopefuls who qualified for the main stage include Florida Sen.

Marco Rubio, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, former Hewlett Packard CEO Carly Fiorina and Ohio Gov. John Kasich.

Qualifying candidates were required to meet one of three criteria in polls conducted between October 29 and December 13 that are recognized by CNN: an average of at least 3.5 percent nationally or at least 4 percent in Iowa or New

Hampshire, the first states to with contests toward the Republican nomination.

The network says lower-polling Republican hopefuls will debate earlier Tuesday night.

They are former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham and former New York Gov. George Pataki. □

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US Financial Front:

Retails sales rise in November as shopping picks up



Shoppers check out at a Wal-Mart Supercenter store in Springdale, Ark. Economists forecast that retail sales rose a seasonally adjusted 0.3 percent last November, according to a survey by FactSet on Friday, Dec. 11, 2015. This would be a modest acceleration from a gain of 0.1 percent in October and flat sales in September.

(AP Photo/Danny Johnston)

JOSH BOAK
ANNE D'INNOCENZIO
AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Holiday shoppers are off to a solid but unspectacular start as retail sales registered a modest gain in November.

The Commerce Department said this weekend that retail sales rose a seasonally adjusted 0.2 percent to \$448 billion last month. This marks an improvement after months of lackluster spending as cheaper gasoline depressed overall sales volumes. Retail spending improved a mere 0.1 percent in October after a 0.1 percent drop in September.

But in November, shoppers upped their spending at clothiers, sporting goods stores and electronics outlets. Spending at online retailers such as Amazon advanced a healthy 0.6 percent. General merchandise stores also improved, but in a bleak sign for chains such as Macy's sales at department stores were flat.

"Despite a weak-ish headline, retail spending in November suggests a firm pace of consumption," said Bricklin Dwyer, a senior economist at the bank BNP Paribas.

The report should provide some relief after evidence of tepid shopping during Black Friday — the day after Thanksgiving when consumers often splurge — and provide a better sense about their confidence in the broader economy. Initial figures indicated that many consumers stayed at home, potentially choosing to browse for holiday gifts online instead of wading through crowds at stores.

The National Retail Federation estimated that spending averaged \$299.60 per person over Thanksgiving weekend. That was down from \$381 last year. But the trade association says the figures are not comparable due to methodology changes.

But the retail sales report confirms that consumers are shifting away from malls and shopping plazas.

Online sales advanced 7.3 percent from a year ago. People are also more eager to eat out, with expenditures at restaurants increasing 0.7 percent in November and 6.5 percent over the past 12 months. Americans have stepped up their purchases of cars this year, although sales at auto dealers slipped 0.6 percent last month.

Tom McGee, president and CEO of International Council of Shopping Centers, the mall trade group, said that he's sticking to a 3.3 percent sales growth for the November and December period.

"I think this is a strong holiday season," he said. "But

clearly changes are taking place that are beginning to take hold."

He noted that Black Friday weekend is no longer as key a barometer because the season starts earlier and earlier.

Mother Nature is also hurting business. Unseasonably warm weather that has continued into December has squelched appetites for cold weather items. That has forced clothing stores like Macy's to step up more discounts than planned to get rid of coats and heavy sweaters. Macy's was offering online "web buster" deals like cashmere sweaters for \$49.99, down from \$139.

Some shoppers are waiting until the last minute because of tight family budgets.

Mildred Vasquez, 38, of East Harlem, was shopping last weekend for clothes with her two boys, ages 4 and 11 at a Target store. She said that it's hard to keep up with the higher costs of basics like rent. So she is waiting until the week before Christmas to buy gifts.

"I am starting after the 17th," Vasquez said. "I am waiting for the deals."

Lower gas prices have restrained retail sales growth. Purchases at gas stations fell 0.8 percent in November and have tumbled 19.9 percent this year. □

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Projections: French far right collapses in regional runoffs

ELAINE GANLEY
ANGELA CHARLTON
Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Marine Le Pen's far-right National Front collapsed in French regional elections Sunday, failing to take a single region after dominating the first round of voting, pollsters projected. The conservatives surged against the governing Socialists, changing the political map of France.

The failure of the National Front to gain any of the six regions where it was leading didn't stop the anti-immigration party from looking to the 2017 presidential election — Le Pen's ultimate goal.

Le Pen had been riding high after extremist attacks and an unprecedented wave of migration into Europe, and the party came out on top in the voting in France's 13 newly drawn regions in the first round a week ago. But projections by France's major polling firms suggested the party lost in all of the regions Sunday, including decisive losses for both Le Pen and her popular niece.



Far Right National Front party leader Marine Le Pen delivers her speech after the results of the second round of the regional elections in Henin-Beaumont, northern France, Sunday Dec.13, 2015. Marine Le Pen's far-right National Front collapsed in French regional elections Sunday after dominating the first round of voting, according to pollsters' projections.

(AP Photo/Thibault Camus)

"Here we stopped the progression of the National Front," said conservative Xavier Bertrand, who was projected to beat Le Pen in the Nord-Pas de Calais region.

Le Pen supporters in a hall

in the gritty northern town of Henin-Beaumont booed his image on a big screen as he spoke. The atmosphere was grim, in stark contrast to a week earlier when Le Pen won more than 40 percent of the vote — and was more than 15 points ahead of Bertrand. Le Pen struck an upbeat tone despite the rout, pledging to keep fighting to expand support for her party. She said she would in the coming weeks "rally all the French, of all origins, who want to join us."

"Nothing will stop us," she told cheering supporters. Ipsos, Ifop and TNS-Sofres-OnePoint projected that Le Pen won around 42 percent compared with Bertrand's 57 percent. Le Pen's niece, Marion Marechal-Le Pen, was projected to win about 45 percent in the southern Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur region, compared with about 55 percent for Conservative Nice Mayor Christian Estrosi. Partial results from the Interior Ministry showed the conservative Republicans

in the lead in six regions, and the Socialists in five. The results were based on the count of between 71 percent and 100 percent of the votes in each region. No results were available Sunday night for the race in the Paris region. Polling agency projections showed the Republican candidate won.

The winner in Corsica wasn't affiliated with a major party. Final official results were expected Monday. The Socialists pulled their candidates out of both races and turnout rose sharply from the first round, suggesting that many voters had cast ballots to prevent the once-pariah National Front from gaining power.

Le Pen denounced the "campaign of calumny decided in the palaces of the (French) Republic," a reference to fear tactics by rivals, including Prime Minister Manuel Valls who warned said the National Front could lead the nation into "civil war."

The big winners Sunday appeared to be the conservative Republican party of former President Nicolas Sarkozy. They won about 41 percent of the nationwide vote, with the Socialists in a distant second at 31 percent and the National Front at about 28 percent, according to TNS-Sofres-OnePoint. □



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Russian destroyer wards off Turkish fishing ship

MOSCOW (AP) — A Russian destroyer used small arms fire on Sunday to ward off a Turkish fishing ship and prevent a collision in the Aegean Sea, the Defense Ministry said, calling the actions of Turkey's vessel "provocative."

The guided missile destroyer Smetlivy was unable to establish radio contact with the approaching Turkish seiner, which also failed to respond to visual signals and flares, the ministry said in a statement. So when the Koroglu Balikcilik was 600 meters (660 yards) away, warning shots were fired from the destroyer and the Turkish ship quickly

changed course, passing within 540 meters (590 yards).

Tensions between Moscow and Ankara have been heightened since a Turkey downed a Russian warplane along the Syrian border last month, and this could further strain relations.

The Defense Ministry summoned the Turkish defense attache in Moscow over what it described as the "provocative actions" of the Turkish ship.

Russian Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov informed Turkish Rear Adm. Ahmet Gunes of "the possible harmful consequences

of the reckless actions of Ankara in regard to the Russian military contingent fighting international terrorism in Syria," the ministry said in a statement.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, speaking to Turkish reporters on the sidelines of a meeting on Libya in Rome, said Turkey would get the Turkish fishing ship's side of the story before making an announcement on the issue, but added that Turkey doesn't favor an escalation of tensions.

"We don't want tensions. We want to overcome tensions through dialogue," Cavusoglu said. □



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Saudi voters elect 20 women candidates for the first time

AYA BATRAWY
Associated Press

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP)

— Saudi voters elected 20 women for local government seats, according to results released to The Associated Press on Sunday, a day after women voted and ran in elections for the first time in the country's history.

The women who won hail from vastly different parts of the country, ranging from Saudi Arabia's largest city to a small village near Islam's holiest site.

The 20 female candidates represent just one percent of the roughly 2,100 municipal council seats up for grabs, but even limited gains are seen as a step forward for women who had previously been completely shut out of elections. Women are still not allowed to drive and are governed by guardianship laws that give men final say over aspects of their lives like marriage, travel and higher education.

Though there are no quotas for female council members, an additional 1,050 seats are appointed with approval by the king who could use his powers to ensure more women are represented.

Around 7,000 candidates, among them 979 women, competed in the elec-

tion for a seat on the municipal councils, which are the only government body elected by Saudi citizens. The two previous rounds of voting for the councils, in 2005 and 2011, were open to men only.

The conservative capital of Riyadh saw the most women candidates win, with four elected. The Eastern Province, where minority Shiites are concentrated, saw two women elected, said Hamad Al-Omar, who heads the General Election Commission's media council.

Saudi Arabia's second largest and most cosmopolitan city, Jiddah, also elected two women, as did one of the most conservative regions, Qassim.

The mayor of the city of Mecca, Osama al-Bar, told the AP that a woman won in a village called Madrasah, about 93 miles (150 kilometers) north of the city which houses the cube-shaped Kaaba to which Muslims around the world pray.

Another woman won in Medina, where the Prophet Muhammad's first mosque was built.

Other women hailing from the kingdom's northernmost areas won, with two elected in Tabuk, one in al-Jawf and another in Hail. Additionally, a wom-



Saudi women vote at a polling center during the municipal elections, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Saturday, Dec. 12, 2015. Women across Saudi Arabia marked a historic milestone on Saturday, both voting and running as candidates in government elections for the first time, but just outside polling stations they waited for male drivers — a reminder of the limitations still firmly in place.

(AP Photo/Aya Batrawy)

an won in Saudi Arabia's southern border area of Jizan, another in Asir and two won in al-Ahsa. Many women candidates ran on platforms that promised more nurseries to offer longer daycare hours for working mothers, the creation of youth community centers with sports and cultural activities, improved roads, better garbage collection and overall greener cities. In October, the Saudi Gazette reported that harsh road conditions and long

distances to the nearest hospital had forced some women in the village of Madrasah, where one female candidate was elected, to give birth in cars. The local newspaper reported that the closest hospital and the nearest university were in Mecca, prompting some students to forgo attending classes. The article said residents were also frustrated with the lack of parks in the village. It is precisely these kinds of community issues that fe-

male candidates hope to address once elected to the municipal councils. The councils do not have legislative powers, but advise authorities and help oversee local budgets.

Most ran their campaigns online, using social media to get the word out, due to strict gender segregation rules that ban men and women from mixing in public. This meant candidates could not directly address voters of the opposite sex. □

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Syrian rebels fire barrage of mortar shells into capital

ALBERT AJI

Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria (AP) — Rebels entrenched in an eastern suburb of Damascus fired volleys of mortar shells into the Syrian capital on Sunday, killing three people, including a child, and wounding 33, Syria's state-run news agency and residents said. Govern-

ment forces hit back with airstrikes that activists said killed at least 28 people.

The Damascus suburb, known as Eastern Ghouta, is held by rebels fighting to topple President Bashar Assad who often launch mortars into Damascus, his seat of power.

Sunday's barrage — more than 40 mortar shells ac-

cording to one report — was particularly strong and sustained, shaking residents out of bed in the early morning as shells struck residential districts.

SANA said a child was killed and three people were wounded, and said the shells caused material damage to cars and buildings. The government re-

sponded with airstrikes and missiles on suspected rebel outposts in Eastern Ghouta. The Local Coordination Committees and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, two opposition outfits that track the war, said at least 28 people were killed in Douma and Saqba, which are part of the same sprawling suburb.

The Observatory reported earlier that 40 shells hit Damascus on Sunday. The shelling came as the United Nations humanitarian chief, Stephen O'Brien, was visiting the Syrian capital to review humanitarian work and assess the impact on civilians of the intensified fighting and military operations. □

Libyans urged to accept cease-fire, embrace UN unity plan



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, left, and Italy's Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni, center, and UN special envoy for Libya Martin Kobler, right, take part in an international conference on Libya at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome Sunday, Dec. 13, 2015.

(Mandel Ngan/Pool Photo via AP)

MATTHEW LEE

AP Diplomatic Writer

ROME (AP) — Diplomats trying to help Libya emerge from the chaos that terrorists have exploited said Sunday that rival political factions in the North African

country need to accept an immediate cease-fire and embrace a U.N.-brokered plan aimed at creating a "secure, democratic, prosperous and unified state." "We refuse to stand by and watch a vacuum filled by

terrorists because all of us are unwilling to do what's necessary to help people who want their freedom, want their independence, want their country back," U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said after a confer-

ence that drew officials from 17 countries, the European Union, the African Union, the Arab League and the United Nations, as well as 15 Libyan leaders.

Members of Libya's two rival parliaments are set to sign the agreement, mediated by U.N. special envoy Martin Kobler during a session Friday in Tunisia, at a ceremony Wednesday in Morocco.

Libya slid into chaos following the 2011 toppling and killing of dictator Moammar Gadhafi. Since then, it has been torn between an internationally recognized government in eastern Tobruk and an Islamist-backed government in the capital, Tripoli, and now faces threats from Islamic State extremists.

IS is trying to extend its influence beyond areas it now

controls, including the city of Sirte.

The envisioned government of national accord is seen as critically important to help restore security and mobilize international support to counter the extremists.

The plan for a national unity government "is not something being sprung on the people of Libya," said Kerry, who hosted the conference with Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni.

"This has been developed by Libyans" through lengthy negotiations and "deserves to breathe the air of a future and of freedom and of possibilities." Gentiloni has pressed other countries to move faster and with more urgency on Libya, which lies just across the Mediterranean from Italy's southern shores. □

Officer questioned in shooting of Palestinian assailant

JOSEF FEDERMAN

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli authorities on Sunday said they have opened an investigation into the actions of a police officer who fatally shot a 16-year-old Palestinian girl during a stabbing attack in Jerusalem last month.

In a statement, the Justice

Ministry said it was looking into whether the officer used excessive force while stopping a stabbing attack by two teenage Palestinian girls. In the Nov. 23 incident, the 16-year-old girl, along with a 14-year-old accomplice, stabbed and wounded a 70-year-old man with scissors before they were shot by the officer.

The ministry said the attorney general had requested the investigation into claims that the officer shot the 16-year-old girl after she had already been restrained. During questioning, the officer said he believed the girl still posed a threat, the statement said. The incident was filmed by a security camera and the

footage was released to the media. The younger girl was wounded.

Palestinians have accused Israel of using excessive force during a three-month wave of violence, and Sunday's announcement appeared to be the first official investigation into the actions of Israeli security forces during the unrest. Is-

rael says its tactics are a legitimate response to stabbings and other attacks.

A total of 19 Israelis and an American seminary student have been killed by Palestinian attacks, mostly stabbings, while at least 112 have been killed on the Palestinian side, including 75 people said by Israel to be attackers. □

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India and Japan sign deals on military, train sales, nukes

ASHOK SHARMA
Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Japan and India signed agreements Saturday that could pave the way for Tokyo to supply New Delhi with military aircraft and high-speed trains, as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe promised to fully support India's efforts to become an economic powerhouse.

The two countries also laid the groundwork for Japan to help India further develop its nuclear power, with a final deal to be signed after technical details are finalized.

Abe described the agreements, signed during his weekend visit to New Delhi, as a new era of cooperation between the two countries.

"In September 2014 in Tokyo, Prime Minister Abe

spoke of \$35 billion of Japanese finance and investments for India over five years," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at a news conference with Abe. "It was ambitious. But together, we are quickly turning it into reality."

Abe said Japan's cooperation with India in the nuclear field would be limited to peaceful objectives.

Japan imposed economic sanctions and cut off financial aid to India in 1998, when New Delhi conducted five nuclear tests. The sanctions were lifted in 2001, and bilateral relations have since improved significantly.

On Saturday, Abe referred to India's stand that it would continue a moratorium on nuclear tests and advance its use of nuclear energy for peaceful pur-



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, right, talks with his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe during the signing of agreement ceremony, in New Delhi, India.

(AP Photo/Manish Swarup)

poses.

India, which has 21 nuclear power plants, has ambitious plans to quadruple its current 5,000 megawatts of nuclear power to 20,000 megawatts by 2020 to fuel the energy demands of its booming economy.

The two countries also signed a deal that would help India's efforts to upgrade its military equipment. Japan's possible sale of US-2 amphibious aircraft to India would be Tokyo's first major military hardware transfer since lifting a

postwar ban on the export of defense equipment in 2014.

Japan also promised technical and financial support to help India build a high-speed train system using Japan's Shinkansen bullet trains. The train service would link the Indian financial hub of Mumbai with Ahmadabad, the commercial capital of Modi's home state, Gujarat, cutting the travel time on the 505-kilometer (315-mile) route from eight hours to two.

India also announced Japan's participation in the India-U.S. Malabar naval exercises on a regular basis to deal with maritime challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

Modi said India and Japan would work together to promote maritime security in the region. □

Band favored by North Korean leader cancels Beijing concerts

C. BODEEN
Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — An all-female band formed by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un canceled its concerts in Beijing and abruptly left the Chinese capital due to unspecified communication issues, possibly further cooling relations between the traditional allies. The Moranbong Band had been scheduled to hold three concerts in Beijing beginning Saturday night in what was viewed as a visit to cultivate ties between

the countries.

The performance "cannot be staged as scheduled due to communication issues at the working level," the official Xinhua News Agency said, citing a news release from unnamed "relevant departments."

Band members arrived at Beijing's airport in North Korean Embassy vehicles on Saturday afternoon, and departed aboard a North Korean Air Koryo jet shortly after 4 p.m. following a lengthy delay, Chinese news website sina.com re-



Members of the Moranbong band wait to leave the hotel for a rehearsal in Beijing, China. The all-female band formed by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un canceled its concerts in Beijing and abruptly left the Chinese capital on Saturday for unknown reasons.

(Chinatopix Via AP)

ported.

A staff member at the National Theater, where the band was to give the invitation-only performances, said the concerts had been canceled, but did not give a reason.

Calls to the International Department of the Communist Party's Central Committee, which organizes exchanges with foreign political parties, rang unanswered on Sunday and there was no statement available online. □

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2 killed when MTV helicopter crashes in Argentina

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — A helicopter working for an MTV reality show crashed in western Argentina on Saturday and both people on board were killed, local authorities said.

The Bell 206 helicopter crashed as it flew over the reservoir at Potrerillos de Mendoza dam about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) northwest of Buenos Aires, Gianni Vernier, security minister for Mendoza province, told the state news agency Telam.

Vernier said the pilot and a technician died. Searchers were unable to retrieve the bodies Saturday because the wreckage was 60 meters (nearly 200 feet) below the surface, Telam said.

The cause of the accident was under investigation. MTV issued a statement saying the helicopter was working on "The Challenge," a co-production of MTV and Bunim-Murray Productions, and was flying to a shooting location when it went down. MTV said only two people were on the helicopter and neither was a cast or show crew member.

It was the second deadly helicopter accident this year in Argentina involving a reality show.

Last March, two helicopters working on the TV survivalist show "Dropped" collided while filming over rugged terrain in northwestern Argentina and all 10 people on board died in the crash. Among the dead were three noted French athletes — pioneering sailor Florence Arthaud and Olympic swimmer Camille Muffat and boxer Alexis Vastine. □

LATIN BRIEFS

Venezuela leader addresses military after election loss

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)

— Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro is telling the military to prepare for a fight as the country remains tense after a landslide defeat of his socialist party in congressional elections. Maduro told troops at a year-end celebration Saturday in Caracas that the coming year will see a political showdown between the socialist administration and its enemies. Soldiers listened solemnly as the late President Hugo Chavez's voice rang out over loudspeakers and applauded when Maduro reminded them of his quick acceptance of Sunday's crushing legislative election loss. All eyes are on the military after the opposition's victory because the armed forces have traditionally been the arbiter of major political fights in Venezuela.

Court rejects race hatred charge for Guyana ex-leader

GEORGETOWN, Guyana (AP)

— A Guyana judge has thrown out charges of inciting racial hatred that had been filed against former President Bharrat Jagdeo. The court in the South American nation on Friday found insufficient evidence to support the criminal charge, which had been lodged by attorney and television talks show host Christopher Ram. The 52-year-old minority leader in parliament had faced expulsion, two years in jail and a \$500 fine if found guilty over statements made ahead of the May 11 parliamentary vote. □

Brazilians rally to demand president's impeachment

Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP)

— Dozens of cities are staging protests across Brazil asking Congress to impeach President Dilma Rousseff.

Hundreds have gathered Sunday in cities such as Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo wearing Brazil's national soccer jersey. They are holding banners that criticize the president and her Workers' Party for a massive corruption scandal at the state-run oil company.

The demonstrations are organized by the same right-leaning groups that produced massive turnouts earlier this year to demand Rousseff's impeachment when the process hadn't started. □



Demonstrators with posters written in Portuguese "Out Dilma and Impeachment" take part in protest for the impeachment of Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff, in the center of Brasilia, Brazil, Sunday, Dec. 13, 2015.

(AP Photo/Eraldo Peres)

Man held after radio caller admits Chile slayings

PATRICIA LUNA

Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — A 62-year-old army veteran has been arrested after a man called a radio talk show and confessed to taking part in 18 killings during the former Chilean dictatorship's so-called dirty war against leftists during the

1970s.

Police arrested former conscript to Guillermo Reyes Rammsy this weekend, identifying him as the man who made an emotional 25-minute call to a radio program this week. A judge placed him under house arrest.

During the program, the

caller who gave his name as "Alberto" recounted taking several people to the desert, shooting them in the head and blowing them up. He said "not even their shadow was left."

"Have you heard where the disappeared are?" the caller asked. "Nobody has told you where the disap-

peared are ... Well, it's because they aren't. They are totally disintegrated. Nothing remained."

Tens of thousands of suspected leftists were rounded up and tortured after Gen. Augusto Pinochet led a 1973 coup that toppled elected Socialist President Salvador Allende. □



Life Is Beautiful Coffee, Kitchen & Drinks Celebrates the Christmas Season with Delicious Regional Food



EAGLE BEACH - Life Is Beautiful Coffee, Kitchen & Drinks is the new experience here on Dushi Aruba. The idea behind this concept is that our guests feel themselves at home with good and delicious food at an affordable price. Our delicious Italian coffee can't be missed! We offer a delightful place where you can relax and unwind. The owners wish to bring everyone together in this unique atmosphere where a positive vibe of peace and tranquility harmonize with cozy kitchen delights. Life Is Beautiful promotes active living and healthy diet with their workshops, and they also host cultural



events too. The owners entrust their success to the 'If you build, it they will come' philosophy.

Life Is Beautiful is nestled in the low rise area of Eagle Beach behind the hospital next to Aqua Windies Cen-

trum and Dive School. It is a very quiet and rustic establishment with plenty of organic charm and am-

biance – even the furniture is made of repurposed materials. Guests can sit outside under the palm trees and enjoying the singing of the birds. We served home-style fresh international dishes with a touch of our regional kitchen, and we have specials on our local Aruban dishes, such as 'stoba,' soup and fish. Our Christmas special is the traditional Venezuelan 'ayaca,' a local treat you cannot miss. The kitchen of Life Is Beautiful Coffee, Kitchen & Drinks is open from Monday thru Saturday from 11:30am till 6pm (closed Sundays). You can also like our Facebook page 'lifeisbeautiful aruba.' □



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day nights tend to get a bit crazier than usual with Crazy Fish Monday! Whether you choose the Fried Fish Basket or a delicious Red Snapper, you'll wish every day was Monday! Double Daily Happy Hour from 5–6PM and 10–11PM, brightens peoples' nights with special priced Balashi beers, wines and cocktails. To complete your evening, Bugaloe's very own exclusive live entertainers will

sing their heart out during Happy Hour! Both Endless Vacation and Cruiseline Magazine named Bugaloe as a top 10 best beach bars in the Caribbean. In the words of The Huffington Post: "Bugaloe is a sexy locale right on the water with that true sense-of-place feel". Reservations are not necessary; just follow your tapping feet down to De Palm Pier where music and fun await you! ☐



For Second Consecutive Year; Aruba is Named "Official Vacation Destination of the IHRA"

ORANJESTAD - The warm, sandy beaches, crystal clear waters and welcoming faces of Aruba have won the hearts of many U.S. visitors. In recent years Aruba's own professional drag racing team, fielded by the Eman family, has championed 'The One Happy Island' among fans, race teams, sponsors and officials in various race organizations. Last year Aruba was named the Official

Vacation Destination of the International Hot Rod Association (IHRA), a partnership which now continues for a second consecutive year into 2016.

"Team Aruba brings a lot of professionalism and integrity to IHRA Drag Racing," stated President of IHRA Motorsports, Scott Gardner. "They are very approachable and the fans are enthusiastic in supporting their racing. Additionally, they

are very patriotic and passionate about Aruba and the great opportunities the country offers. Outstanding spokespeople, quality racing and truly the real deal that promotes Aruba as 'The One Happy Island' it is."

Throughout Team Aruba's time competing in the Pro Stock they have utilized a variety of outlets to promote Aruba as a vacation destination. From face-to-



face invitations to mass media publications, the Emans and the rest of the crew for the Aruba.com Mustang are ambassadors for what is one of the top vacation spots in the world. "Team Aruba has always aimed at promoting the Aruba.com website and Aruba as a tourist destination to everyone in the industry from the thousands of race fans at each event to race teams, staff and personnel, sponsors and companies associated with the industry," told pilot of the Aruba.com Mustang, Trevor Eman. "As is true in many aspects of the performance industry, working, traveling to, and competing and in IHRA events is very demanding. We all need chances to get away and refuel. We believe there is no better place to do that than Aruba."

"This is why Team Aruba made the connection with the IHRA to have Aruba be the Official Vacation Destination. When the season ending comes along, we can start thinking of white sand beaches and Aruba juice in our hands."

Many drivers, crews and

their families have made Aruba a repeat vacation destination. Former Pro Stock World Champion, John Montecalvo and his wife Lois Anne, recently vacationed in Aruba, a spot they now go to frequently. "Lois Anne and I have traveled extensively to many vacation destinations and by far, Aruba is our favorite," stated Montecalvo. "The weather is always good, never any hurricanes, and plenty of great restaurants. Everything is either in walking distance or a short drive away, and we have always felt safe traveling around the island. "Without a doubt it is the friendliest place that we have ever vacationed. We have highly recommended it to our family and friends. It truly is 'One Happy Island'." As the Official Vacation Destination of the IHRA, information on visiting Aruba including travel plans from the U.S. to Aruba, will be available at each of the IHRA National Events in 2016. Stop by the highly visible and uniquely decorated Team Aruba pits to inquire about vacationing to the island paradise. □

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Roll Henry! Alabama's Super-Sized Running Back Wins Heisman

Page 18



Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver Martavis Bryant (10) is tackled by Cincinnati Bengals outside linebacker Vontaze Burfict (55) in the first half of an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 13, 2015, in Cincinnati. Pittsburgh pulled off a 33-20 victory on Sunday that left the AFC North up for grabs.

(AP Photo/Frank Victores)

Steelers Post 33-20 Win Over Bengals, Who Lose QB Dalton

JOE KAY

Associated Press

CINCINNATI (AP) - With a chance to clinch the division at home, the Bengals lost their quarterback and got roughed up for the first

time all season.

Andy Dalton broke his right thumb while making a tackle on his interception, and the Pittsburgh Steelers roughed up backup AJ McCarron while pulling

away to a 33-20 victory on Sunday that left the AFC North up for grabs.

The Steelers (8-5) rumbled with the Bengals during pregame warmups and then led the whole way,

sending Cincinnati (10-3) to its first lopsided loss of the season.

William Gay returned one of McCarron's passes 23 yards for a touchdown, and Ben Roethlisberger had another

good day as Pittsburgh's resurgent offense kept rolling. Pittsburgh has scored 30 points in five straight games, a franchise record.

Continued on page 19



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Roll Henry! Alabama's super-sized running back wins Heisman

RALPH D. RUSSO

AP College Football Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Alabama's super-sized running back Derrick Henry was awarded the Heisman Trophy on Saturday for college football's player of the season.

The 1.89-meter (6-foot-3), 110-kilogram (242-pound) Henry is the second Alabama player to win the Heisman, joining Mark Ingram. Since Ingram won

the award in 2009, it had gone to five straight quarterbacks.

Stanford tailback Christian McCaffrey was the runner-up, making it four second-place finishes for Cardinal players in seven seasons. Deshaun Watson, quarterback for Clemson, finished third.

It was the closest Heisman voting since Ingram won by the slimmest margin ever, but still a comfortable vic-

tory for Henry. He received 1,832 points, 293 more than McCaffrey (1,539). Watson received the third-most points for a third-place finisher with 1,165.

Oklahoma quarterback Baker Mayfield came in fourth and Navy quarterback Keenan Reynolds was fifth, but Henry, McCaffrey and Watson dominated the voting.

Henry broke the Southeastern Conference record



Alabama's Derrick Henry kisses the Heisman Trophy while posing for photos after winning the award as the country's top college football player, Saturday, Dec. 12, 2015, in New York.

(AP Photo/Julie Jacobson)

with 1,986 yards rushing — previously held by 1982 Heisman winner Herschel Walker — and matched a league mark with 23 touchdowns, leading the Crimson Tide to the four-team College Football Playoff. He choked up during his speech, thanking his family, coaches and teammates, and mentioning former Alabama teammate Altee Tenpenny, who was killed in a car crash two months ago.

Henry was born to teenage parents and raised with the strong influence of his grandmother, Gladys, in the small north Florida town of Yulee, which is just outside Jacksonville, but very much country living.

Gladys Henry has been hospitalized for weeks in Florida with heart and respiratory problems. Henry came to Alabama as a five-star recruit but being bigger, stronger and faster wasn't enough in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

He was a backup as a

freshman and thought about transferring, but with the encouragement of his family decided to stay put. As a second-year player he shared carries with T.J. Yeldon and ran for 990 yards and 11 touchdowns, showing signs of big things to come.

This season, with Alabama breaking in a first-time starting quarterback and inexperienced receivers, coach Nick Saban and the Tide decided to hook the offense to Henry and let him lead the way.

After Ingram won the Heisman in '09, he helped Alabama win the national championship about a month later. Henry will try to do the same. The Tide faces Michigan State in the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 31, trying to earn a fourth national championship in nine seasons under Saban.

Henry has not announced his intentions yet, but a jump to the NFL seems likely after this season. □

Steelers Post 33-20 Win Over Bengals, Who Lose QB Dalton

Continued from page 17

The game — and potentially Cincinnati's season — turned on one interception. Stephon Tuitt picked off Dalton's shovel pass in the first quarter, and Dalton broke his right thumb while making the tackle. He will see a specialist on Monday and get a better idea how many weeks he will miss. Dalton wore a black cast on the hand. "Mentally I'm fine," Dalton said. "It's unfortunate it happened at this point in the season. I'm doing all right. There are a lot of people who are way worse off than I am."

Dalton has been one of the NFL's most durable quarterbacks, missing only half a game during his five seasons because of injury. He was leading the league in passer rating heading into the game. Now, the Bengals' chances are in the hands of a second-year quarterback from Alabama who missed all of his rookie season with a sore passing shoulder. McCarron threw a 66-yard touchdown pass to A.J. Green, who ran past cornerback Antwon Blake, but also threw a floating sideline pass that Gay returned for a touchdown and a 23-7 lead early in the second half. McCarron, who had thrown only four passes in a mop-up role before Sunday, finished 22 of 32 for 280 yards with two touchdowns and a pair of interceptions that led to Steelers touchdowns. The Bengals had the few-

est injured players in the league heading into the game, but also lost tight end Tyler Eifert to a concussion in the first half. Eifert was leading the NFL in touchdown catches.

The Steelers have recovered from significant losses of their own — Roethlisberger missing time with a sprained knee, running back Le'Veon Bell out for the season with a knee injury — and hit their stride in the last five games.

Roethlisberger has been at his best. He went 30 of 39 for 282 yards with an interception as the Steelers protected a big lead in the second half. DeAngelo Williams ran for a pair of touchdowns, and Chris Boswell made field goals from 42, 47, 45 and 31 yards.

The Steelers had looked forward to the rematch in Cincinnati since the Bengals' 16-10 victory in Pittsburgh on Nov. 1, one that ended with trash talking and tough feelings. The dislike bubbled out during warmups when players from both teams got into a brief shouting-and-shoving match at midfield.

Also, Bengals cornerback Adam "Pacman" Jones — who was inactive with a foot injury — sent a profane tweet about Pittsburgh pregame.

By the fourth quarter, all the drama was gone. Bengals fans headed for the exits after Robert Golden picked off McCarron with 5:14 to go, leaving Steelers fans to twirl their Terrible Towels in celebration as Pittsburgh scored a clinching touchdown. □



Pittsburgh Steelers running back DeAngelo Williams (34) reacts as he is tackled by Cincinnati Bengals cornerback Dre Kirkpatrick (27) and outside linebacker Vontaze Burfict (55) in the first half of an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 13, 2015, in Cincinnati. Pittsburgh pulled off a 33-20 victory on Sunday that left the AFC North up for grabs.

(AP Photo/Frank Victores)

Lanny and Tucker Wadkins win Father/Son Challenge

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Lanny and Tucker Wadkins won the PNC Father/Son Challenge on Sunday with an eagle on the first hole of a four-team playoff.

Tucker made the 40-foot eagle putt on the par-5 18th at Ritz-Carlton Golf Club. The 23-year-old former University of Arizona player works in investor relations.

"Tucker hit a spectacular

tee shot, one of the best he's hit all week," the 66-year-old Lanny said. "He hit 4-iron, I hit 5-wood I got it a little closer. He made a 40-footer. I'll remember what he did in making that putt." The Wadkins closed with a 9-under 63 to match Davis and Dru Love, Larry and Drew Nelson, and Fred and Taylor Funk at 20 under in the scramble tournament. □

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McGregor stops Aldo in 13 seconds, wins UFC belt



Conor McGregor knocks out Jose Aldo during a featherweight championship mixed martial arts bout at UFC 194, Saturday, Dec. 12, 2015, in Las Vegas.

(AP Photo/John Locher)

GREG BEACHAM
AP Sports Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Conor McGregor stopped Jose Aldo with one spectacular punch just 13 seconds

into the first round Saturday night, backing up his bravado and claiming the undisputed featherweight title at UFC 194 on Saturday night.

McGregor (19-2) finished the fight with an electrifying exchange shortly after the opening bell, slipping Aldo's lead right and cracking Aldo on the jaw with a huge left hand.

Aldo (25-2) actually finished his punch and hit McGregor with a left, but the champ fell senseless to the ground and McGregor pounced, only to be pulled off in victory.

Aldo had won 18 consecutive fights over the last 10 years, but nothing seems to slow McGregor. The loquacious Irish brawler goaded Aldo throughout the promotion of their delayed bout, only to back up every word he said. □

GOLF NOTES

Donaldson wins by 3 in Thailand Championship

CHONBURI, Thailand (AP)

— Jamie Donaldson won his first title of the year after beating Clement Sordet of France and defending champion Lee Westwood by three strokes in the final round of the Thailand Championship at the Amata Country Club on Sunday.

The No. 68-ranked Donaldson rallied from two shots behind at the start of the day to shoot a final-round 65 that featured nine birdies and two bogeys for an overall 21-under-par 267 to win the title. The victory gives the Welshman one of four berths into next year's British Open. Third round leader Sordet, who turned professional just six months ago, showed signs of nerves and struggled with his putts before signing off with a 70 for a 270. □

Langer wins PGA Tour Champions player of year

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. (AP)

— Bernhard Langer won the Jack Nicklaus Award on Saturday as the PGA Tour Champions player of the year for the record fifth time. Langer also won the award in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2014. The 58-year-old German star successfully defended his Senior Players title in June in Massachusetts for his fifth senior major title and won in San Antonio in October for his 25th victory on the 50-and-over tour. "I'm thrilled to be voted by my peers as the player of the year," Langer said. □

South Africa wins Cape Town Sevens tournament

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — Rosko Speckman and Seabelo Senatla scored two tries apiece as South Africa beat Argentina 29-14 to win the Cape Town Sevens and join Fiji at the top of the sevens rugby world series standings. While the Blitzboks' physicality had been a major feature of their play through the weekend, it was the speed of Speckman and Senatla that proved the difference in the final, as the

hosts ran in five tries to Argentina's two. The result meant that South Africa won its own world series event for the third year running, and the 22 points it earned put them level with Fiji on 35 after two rounds. France pipped Kenya to third place, winning the playoff 28-26, having knocked out world series champion Fiji in the quarterfinals. Fiji, which won the opening leg of the world series in

Dubai last weekend, went on to win the Plate on Sunday as it beat the USA 29-19 in the final. □

South Africa's passage into the quarterfinals was in doubt after it was shocked by Kenya on Saturday afternoon, but it was faultless thereafter.

It made light work of Australia in the quarterfinals on Sunday, then beat France 21-12 in the semifinal.

"The guys decided after yesterday to pull together

and start playing rugby," South Africa coach Neil Powell said. "I'm really proud of them today. You have to work for everything, nothing is given to us and Argentina put us under lots of pressure."

Argentina had not qualified for a Cup final since 2009, but opened the scoring through German Schulz.

South Africa hit back from the restart as Speckman showed the Argentine defense a clean pair of heels, and the host was in front soon after when Senatla ran onto a grubber from Justin Geduld, who was named man of the final for his creative display.

After Specman had put South Africa further ahead, Axel Muller shrugged off two tackles to pull one back for Argentina and make it 17-14 at halftime. □




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Spain begins quest for 3rd Euro title against Czechs

JEROME PUGMIRE
AP Sports Writer

PARIS (AP) — Defending champion Spain begins its quest for a third straight European Championship title against the Czech Republic, while host France also escaped with a relatively unthreatening group in Saturday's draw and opens Euro 2016 against Romania on June 10.

World Cup winner Germany will also be content with the draw, although Italy wasn't so lucky and neither was England.

Spain's other opponents in Group D are Turkey and Croatia, while coach Didier Deschamps' France also takes on newcomer Albania and Switzerland in Group A.

Although Spain is the only team to have won the competition consecutively, and won nine out of 10 games in qualifying, coach Vicente del Bosque remains cautious.

"It's going to be very difficult for us," he said.

Germany faces Robert Lewandowski's Poland, Ukraine and Northern Ireland in Group C, while England has its work cut out against local rival Wales and Russia in Group B, which also contains Slovakia.

"We have a rather balanced group ... which we have to win," Germany coach Joachim Loew said. "We're favorites in the

group and we want to win it."

Loew's confidence was echoed by former midfielder Lothar Matthaeus,

form for Bayern Munich. Italy will not be relishing Group E much, which contains a top-ranked Belgian side — featuring Chel-

difficult opponents we could have." Sweden vs. Belgium looks like a mouth-watering final match in that group.

ing midfield role, Austria won 4-1 away to Sweden in a performance full of speed and menace.

"(Austria) qualified directly from their group, eliminating the Netherlands in the process, which says a lot about their potential," Portugal coach Fernando Santos said.

"Austria is also a team that has been improving lately and has great players, like David Alaba, Christian Fuchs and Marko Arnautovic.

They finished their group on a high and we will have to be careful with them." England will first play Russia in Marseille on June 11 and there is likely to be a heavy security presence after serious outbreaks of fan violence there when England played Tunisia during the 1998 World Cup.

"Russia and Slovakia will be interesting. I have not come across either of those two teams in my international management before," England coach Roy Hodgson said. "There will be plenty of research between now and June and we can find out as much as we can before the campaign. Wales are very well organized, have a team spirit and very strong spine."

Wales' hopes of progressing rest largely with Real Madrid winger Gareth Bale, who scored seven goals in qualifying. □



The coaches of teams drawn in group D, from left: Croatian coach Ante Cacic, Vicente Del Bosque, the coach of Spain, Turkish coach Fatih Terim and Pavel Vrba, the coach of the Czech Republic pose for a photo after the Euro 2016 soccer championships draw in Paris Saturday, Dec. 12, 2015.

(AP Photo/Michel Euler)

who captained West Germany to the World Cup title in 1990.

"There are trickier groups," he said. "German football fans can look forward to the second round."

But Germany's defense will need to be wary of Lewandowski, the top scorer in qualifying with 13 goals, who has been in rampant

sea's Eden Hazard and Manchester City's Vincent Kompany — Sweden, led by Paris Saint-Germain star Zlatan Ibrahimovic, and a rejuvenated Ireland.

"Belgium are a great team with outstanding players," Italy coach Antonio Conte said, while Belgium coach Marc Wilmots was equally wary, saying "it's the most

Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo will be confident of adding to his record 26 goals in Euros, including qualifiers, in a Group F featuring Iceland and Hungary, but Austria was unbeaten in qualifying and poses a strong threat.

In September, with Bayern Munich's David Alaba playing in a more attack-

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Kristoffersen wins World Cup slalom race ahead of Hirscher

VAL D'ISERE, France (AP)

— Henrik Kristoffersen of Norway easily protected his lead from the first run to win the opening World Cup slalom race of the season on Sunday, beating Marcel Hirscher of Austria by 1.09 seconds and taking the first round in what promises to be a fascinating contest for the overall slalom title.

Seeking a fifth straight overall World Cup title, the 26-year-old Hirscher already holds a commanding lead, but Kristoffersen's classy performance will give him something to think about in his bid for a fourth straight slalom title. The next slalom race is in the Italian resort of Madonna di Campiglio on Dec. 22.

"The course was really tight and turny, but it was like that for everyone," Kristoffersen said. "On the second run, I knew that Marcel had skied really fast and that I had to push it."

Hirscher, who earned a record fifth win in Val d'Isere in the giant slalom on Saturday, was eighth after the morning run but powered down the second run to keep the pressure on.

"After the first run, it was dis-

appointing. We analyzed it and changed things a lot for the second run," Hirscher said. "I'm happy and I'm super pumped. It was one of those runs that I usually skied when I was 18 years-old. I was great to be sometimes over my limit."

The 21-year-old Kristoffersen won his fifth career race and fourth in slalom. His other win was in GS at another French Alpine resort in Meribel in March during the world finals, and his previous slalom win was at the Slovenian resort of Kranjska Gora — a week before Meribel. Kristoffersen is also an Olympic bronze medalist in slalom.

Felix Neureuther of Germany improved from fifth in the morning to take third ahead of American David Chodounsky — who secured a career-best fourth place and a fifth top-10 finish.

"It's unreal, fourth place is amazing. To start off the slalom season like this is super cool, get your mind where you want it to be," Chodounsky said. "My first run I got popped in the face, but I still had a good run. I brought my focus in



Norway's Henrik Kristoffersen competes during the men's World Cup giant slalom in Val D'Isere, France. Kristoffersen easily protected his lead from the first run to win the opening World Cup slalom race of the season on Sunday.

(AP Photo/Pier Marco Tacca)

a bit (for the) second run, calmed down."

The 31-year-old Chodounsky's previous best was fifth at a City event in Moscow in 2013. In December of that year, he also placed seventh in slalom at Val d'Isere, which is becoming one of his favorite courses. "Even though it's a tough hill. I still feel comfortable," he said. "I love coming

here."

Veteran Julien Lizeroux, the 2009 world championship silver medalist in slalom, also had a good day, taking fifth place. Chodounsky's impressive performance was also a welcome boost for the U.S. team, softening the blow of another disappointing day for Ted Ligety, who tied 20th with Austrian Michael Matt.

Ligety failed to qualify for the second run in Saturday's GS, having crashed in the Beaver Creek GS last weekend. Meanwhile, Kristoffersen enjoyed better luck than Saturday, when he was just .14 behind Olympic silver medalist Hirscher after the first run but went out after straddling a gate on the top section in the second run. □

With Shiffrin out, Vihova grabs 1st career win in slalom



Slovakia's Petra Vihova celebrates after winning a women's World Cup slalom in Are, Sweden, Sunday, Dec. 13, 2015.

(AP Photo/Giovanni Auletta)

ANDREW DAMPF

AP Sports Writer

Former junior world champion Petra Vihova of Slovakia took advantage of Mikaela Shiffrin's absence to win the first World Cup race of her career Sunday by taking a slalom in Are, Sweden.

The 20-year-old Vihova added to her surprising first-run lead to win by more than half a second over home favorite Frida Hansdotter of Sweden.

Hansdotter moved up from

fifth after the opening leg to finish 0.59 seconds behind.

Nina Loeseth of Norway dropped from second after the morning run to place third, 0.65 behind.

Shiffrin, the Olympic and two-time world champion, flew home to the United States for tests on her right knee after crashing while warming up for Saturday's giant slalom race. The American had won the last five slalom races stretching back to last season.

Overall World Cup leader Lindsey Vonn also sat out, as she no longer races slalom. Vonn won Saturday's giant slalom for her fourth consecutive victory.

Hansdotter moved 20 points ahead of Shiffrin atop the slalom standings and Vihova jumped up to third, 60 points behind.

One of Sweden's more popular athletes, Hansdotter finished second behind Shiffrin in the season-long World Cup slalom standings for the last two years. □

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AP EXPLAINS: What are my options for mobile pay?



Eddy Cue, Apple Senior Vice President of Internet Software and Services, demonstrates the new Apple Pay mobile payment system at a Whole Foods store in Cupertino, Calif. Everyone from Apple to Starbucks has introduced their own mobile payment system as smartphones have grown in popularity.

MAE ANDERSON
AP Technology Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — With Wal-Mart Stores Inc. becoming the latest retailer to launch a mobile pay system, there are more places than ever to break out a digital wallet to pay for the things you want.

Apple, Rite Aid, Starbucks, KFC and others are now using some form of mobile payment system with a smartphone seemingly in every pocket and purse. Forrester predicts that money spent in stores by people using digital wallets will grow from the \$4 billion of 2014, to \$34 billion by 2019. But not all digital wallets are the same. So which ones should you use and how safe are they? Here's a look at mobile payment systems and how they work.

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Smartphone owners can use Apple Pay, Android Pay and Samsung Pay, depending on what phone they have. All three services let people buy goods at participating stores by tapping their phones against the store's payment terminal. The user's debit or credit card on file then gets charged.

Merchant Customer Exchange, or MCX, set up a few years ago by a consortium of retailers and restaurants to create an industry-wide mobile payment system, is currently testing its CurrentC wallet for iPhones and Android phones in Columbus, Ohio.

Of retailer-specific digital wallets, Starbucks and now Wal-Mart, are the biggest players. Starbucks' mobile app has more than 16 million users and accounts for 21 percent of its pur-

chases. Wal-Mart's service won't debut until early next year, but 22 million customers already use the Wal-Mart app each month, and more than half of Wal-Mart's online orders are now coming from a mobile device.

Banks are jumping in, too. JPMorgan Chase is working on its own system for mobile payments expected to debut next year.

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Plus, have you seen those studies on the number of vi-

ruses and bacteria on your typical dollar bill? Gross.

IS IT SAFE?

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Continued on Page 27

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Of Mutual Interest:

Seeing opportunity, stock-pickers narrow their portfolios

STAN CHOE

AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — It's been a rough few years for stock-picking mutual-fund managers, and investors keep dumping them for the higher returns and lower expenses of index funds. Now, stock pickers say,

tential to achieve much better returns than an index fund. But it can also increase risk.

That means investors should pay close attention to another number when checking out a mutual fund. Along with fees, returns and volatility, have a look

large-cap stock fund managers fell short of the S&P 500, in line with the historical average. For the decade through 2014, 82 percent of large-cap funds couldn't keep up with the S&P 500, according to S&P Dow Jones Indices. Investors noticed, and

make up for the higher expenses they charge. One reason is how uniformly stocks have been behaving.

With interest rates at record lows in recent years and the Federal Reserve buying billions of dollars in bonds to stimulate the economy, stocks climbed and fell together in great herds. In 2013, 91 percent of stocks in the Standard & Poor's 500 index rose.

When the whole market is moving up as one, it doesn't matter much which stock a fund manager picks. So why not stick with index funds, which track the broader market and charge much lower fees?

As Peter Clark, managing director at Jennison Associates, puts it: an actively managed portfolio "struggles when the tide lifts all boats."

A MORE SPLIT MARKET

This year has seen a shift in that pattern. The S&P 500 is more evenly split between winners and losers. At one end is Netflix, up 154.5 percent through Wednesday. At the other is Consol Energy, down nearly 80 percent.

Fund managers expect this more fractured market to continue, as the Federal Reserve pulls back its stimulus measures. The central bank is widely expected to raise interest rates this upcoming week for the first time in nearly a decade. In

such a market, stock pickers say they'll finally get rewarded for choosing the right stocks and avoiding the wrong ones.

Jennison's Clark says he is focusing on industries that are producing strong revenue growth, such as technology, health care and companies that rely on discretionary spending by consumers. Growth is still scarce in the global economy, and Clark expects that the few companies which manage to achieve it will be rewarded.

Clark is also focusing on fewer stocks. Jennison's global equity portfolio is invested in about 40 stocks, for example. A couple years ago, it was closer to 55.

HIGHER REWARD, HIGHER RISK?

Bob Burnstine is an unabashed stock picker. He used to work at Harris Associates, whose Oakmark Select fund holds only 20 stocks. Since 2011, he's been investing for clients at Fairpointe Capital, and he now is the lead portfolio manager at the Aston/Fairpointe Focused Equity mutual fund, which holds just 30 to 35 stocks.

That approach has worked in the past. Burnstine beat his benchmark, the Russell 1000 index, and the S&P 500 for the three years through 2014. But this year, the strategy has hurt him. Burnstine's fund doesn't own any shares of Netflix.



Specialist Jarret Johnson works at his post on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. It's been a rough few years for stock-picking mutual-fund managers, and investors keep dumping them for the higher returns and lower expenses of index funds. That may be about to change.

(AP Photo/Richard Drew))

market conditions are starting to turn in their favor as stocks increasingly go in different directions rather than moving in unison. Many are feeling so confident that they're paring down the number of stocks they hold to concentrate on the select few they expect to be big winners.

A concentrated approach gives stock pickers the po-

at how many stocks a fund owns. It may be fewer than you think.

FIGHTING AGAINST THE TIDE

Over the last several years, only a handful of actively managed funds have kept up with the Standard & Poor's 500 index or other benchmarks, let alone beat them.

Last year, 86 percent of

pulled \$153 billion from actively managed U.S. stock funds in the first 10 months of this year, according to Morningstar. Nearly that much, \$121 billion, went into their index-fund rivals. Returns haven't necessarily been poor for actively managed funds. Most are up strongly in recent years. They just haven't earned enough over the index to

SEC moves toward limits on funds' use of derivatives

MARCY GORDON

AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal regulators are moving toward imposing restrictions on the use of derivatives by mutual funds, aiming to protect investors in funds that rely on the high-risk transactions.

Members of the Securities and Exchange Commission voted 3-1 at a public meeting this weekend to propose the limits on derivatives use by mutual funds as well as exchange-trad-

ed funds. ETFs, which have been growing in popularity, track a market index or basket of stocks and trade through the day.

The proposal goes out for public comment for 90 days, and it could be formally adopted by the SEC sometime after that.

Derivatives are investment tools whose value stems from an underlying investment such as oil, stocks or interest rates. Traded in a \$600 trillion global market that wasn't regulated, they

were a central factor behind the financial crisis that erupted in 2008. Derivatives were brought under federal supervision in the 2010 law overhauling regulation of the financial markets.

Derivatives can be used to hedge against risks, but they also are used by financial firms to speculate. Derivatives trading can produce steep losses or huge profits, if the value of the underlying asset sinks or soars. Investment funds — with about \$67 trillion in

assets managed by firms under SEC supervision — are relied upon by millions of Americans for their retirement savings.

"Inadequate controls on the use of derivatives can create significant risks for funds themselves and investors, as well as raise questions about the potential impacts on the broader financial system," SEC Chair Mary Jo White said before the vote. Investment funds may use derivatives to score higher re-

turns, to hedge risks in their portfolios or for other financial strategies. An analysis by SEC economists found that some funds rely heavily on derivatives, sometimes carrying up to 10 times as much in potentially risky investments in their portfolios as their total amount of assets. Most mutual funds don't use them extensively. The ones that do face increased risks of big, rapid losses from derivatives investments, potentially hurting investors, the SEC says.

Alibaba buys Hong Kong's South China Morning Post newspaper

KELVIN CHAN
AP Business Writer

HONG KONG (AP) — Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba said this weekend it's buying Hong Kong's leading English-language newspaper, the South China Morning Post, as part of a plan to create a global platform for news about China.

Alibaba Group Holdings Ltd., founded by billionaire Jack Ma, said it signed a deal with publisher SCMP Group to buy the Post and the company's other media assets, which include magazines, outdoor advertising and digital media.

The newspaper said in a story on its website that the purchase price is not being disclosed.

The acquisition gives control of the Asian financial center's most prominent English-language publication to a mainland Chinese company. As news emerged over the past few weeks that the two parties were in talks, there were fears that the newspaper's reporting would be softened under new owners.

In a statement, Alibaba Executive Vice Chairman Joe Tsai dismissed worries that the editorial independence would be compromised.

"In reporting the news, the SCMP will be objective, accurate and fair," said.

The Post has a wide international following for its China coverage, including reporting on the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown and extensive coverage of last year's pro-democracy street protests in Hong Kong. The newspaper has won awards for its coverage of political scandals and human rights in China, topics that are off-limits to mainland media.

The Post and other news media in the former British colony have more freedom to report because the city has a mini-constitution that guarantees freedom of the press and other civil liberties not seen on the mainland. However, there's widespread concern that press freedom is shrinking as Beijing, which took control of Hong Kong in 1997, tightens its grip on the city.

The 112-year-old Post was once reputed to be the world's most profitable newspaper on a per-reader basis although its fortunes have suffered in line with the wider decline in the traditional newsprint industry as readers shift to online news sites.

Its influence has also been overtaken by Chinese dailies since Beijing took control of the city from Britain in 1997, although it still retains an important position among the city's English-speaking elite.

"Why is Alibaba buying into traditional media, considered by some a sunset industry? The simple answer is that we don't see it that way," Tsai said as he outlined a lofty vision of marrying Alibaba's experience in technology with the Post's journalism track record to create a China-focused media giant with an international audience.

As part of its goal to broaden its readership, the company plans to stop charging for access to the Post's website, SCMP.com, Tsai said.

"Our vision is to expand the SCMP's readership globally through digital distribution and easier access to content," he said.

The newspaper's magazine division has a license to publish the local Chinese-language editions of Cosmopolitan and Harper's Bazaar. It also has a stake in the Bangkok Post newspaper. It took its first step into e-commerce in October by buying a majority stake in fashion site MyDress.com. □

Regulators: Walgreens-Rite Aid deal under scrutiny

TOM MURPHY
AP Business Writer

The Federal Trade Commission wants more information about Walgreens' \$9.41-billion plan to buy rival drugstore chain Rite Aid, a sign that regulators may be concerned about the deal's impact on competition.

Walgreens said this weekend that it fielded a request for additional information

not connected to this case. Walgreens said in a brief statement that the companies still expect to close their deal in the second half of next year. Spokesman Michael Polzin declined to comment when asked whether the company has any concerns about the acquisition passing regulatory review.

The request for additional information is not a sign the

The drugstore chain also told investors after announcing the deal in late October that the agreement calls for divesting up to 1,000 stores if required by regulators. But the company also said it believes it will probably have to get rid of less than half that number. Grunes said regulators don't take these requests for additional information lightly because they



This photo shows the "Walgreens" logo over windows at the store in Wexford, Pa. The Federal Trade Commission wants more information about Walgreens' \$9.41-billion plan to buy rival drugstore chain Rite Aid, a sign that regulators may be worried about the deal's impact on competition.

(AP Photo/Keith Srakocic)

beyond what the companies have already been required to provide under the Hart-Scott-Rodino Antitrust Improvements Act of 1976. Walgreens said it expected the request.

A former Justice Department attorney said regulators ask for more information when their initial review of a deal suggests that there are "serious competitive concerns."

"I think it's a big deal," said Allen Grunes, who led merger investigations as an antitrust attorney with the Justice Department. Grunes is a co-founder and attorney at the Konkurrent Group in Washington and is

deal is doomed. Regulators could do nothing, or they might challenge the acquisition or ask the companies to shed some stores. Health insurers Anthem Inc. and Aetna Inc. also have received requests for more information regarding their respective, pending acquisitions of rivals Cigna Corp. and Humana Inc.

Walgreens Boots Alliance Inc. runs 8,173 U.S. stores, while Rite Aid Corp. has around 4,600. Walgreens has said that Rite Aid's presence in the Northeast and Southern California will help the combined company cover the entire United States.

generally cost companies millions of dollars to fulfill. He said they often involve requests for more information on business and pricing plans, contracts with suppliers and customers and documentation of expected savings from a deal, among many other things. "It's generally a major undertaking," he said.

Shares of Deerfield, Illinois-based Walgreens Boots Alliance Inc. fell 2.6 percent, or \$2.20, to \$81.22 in afternoon trading Friday while broader indexes fell more than 1 percent. Shares of Camp Hill, Pennsylvania-based Rite Aid Corp. fell 5 cents to \$7.82. □

Bridgestone inks \$863M deal to acquire Pep Boys

The Associated Press (AP) Pep Boys has agreed to be acquired by Bridgestone for \$863 million in cash after the tires and auto service company sweetened its offer following a bid from Carl Icahn's investment firm.

Bridgestone and Pep Boys said this weekend that

the new offer amounts to \$15.50 for each Pep Boys share, an increase from its previous offer of \$15 per share.

Pep Boys' board of directors is unanimously recommending that the company's shareholders accept the offer.

The company said that

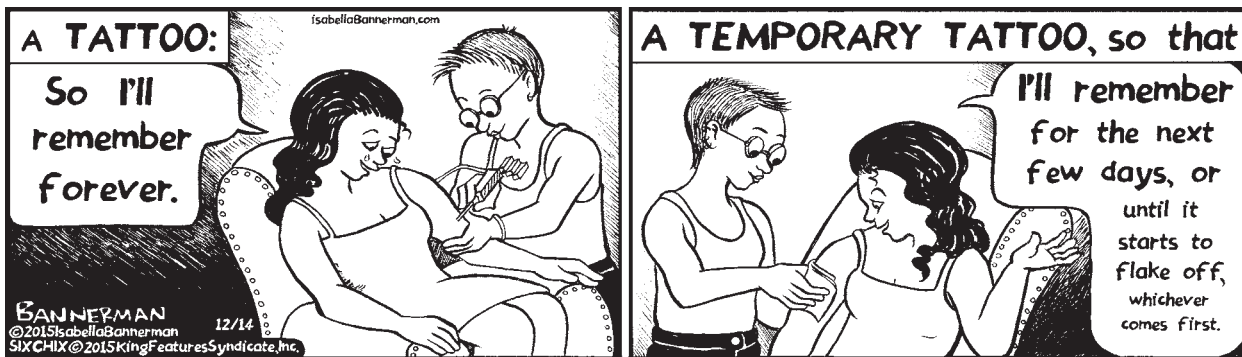
its board no longer sees Icahn's \$837.4 million buy-out offer as a superior proposal.

Pep Boys - Manny, Moe & Jack, based in Philadelphia, has about 800 locations around the country that sells auto parts and repairs vehicles. Bridgestone Corp. is based in Tokyo. □

Mutts



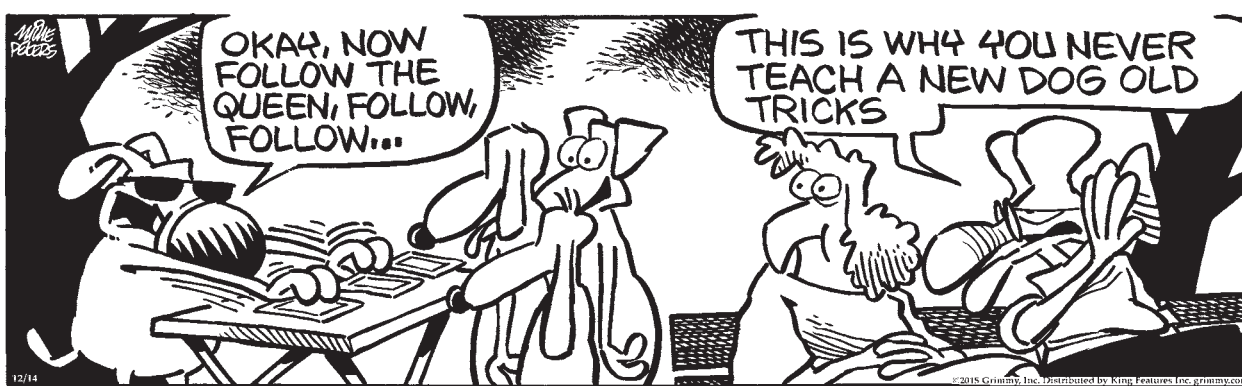
6 Chix



Blondie



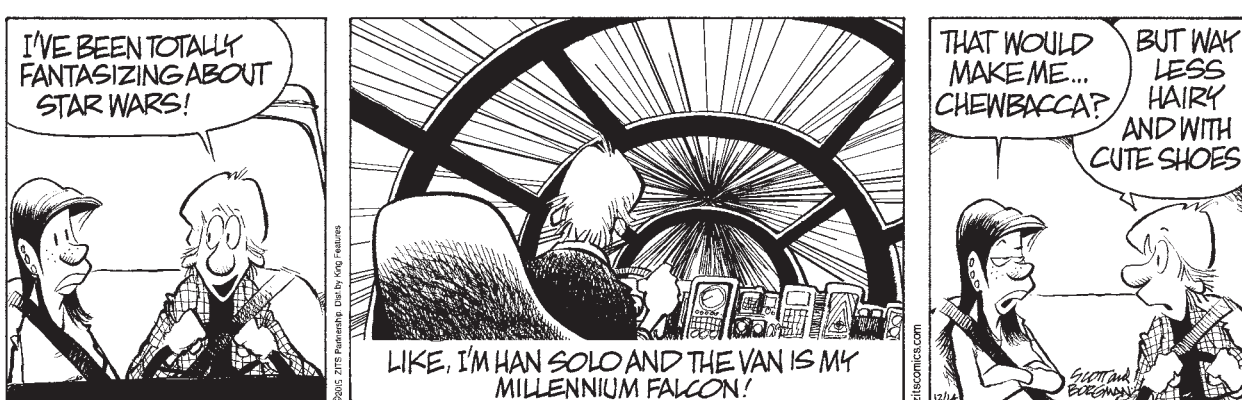
Mother Goose & Grimm



Baby Blues



Zits



Conceptis Sudoku

	2		4			1	5	
8	5	3						2
	7			2		3		8
4			1		9			
		5				2		
			5		2			9
9		1		5			4	
5						6	2	1
	4	8			3		7	

Difficulty Level ★

12/14

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

Saturday's puzzle answer

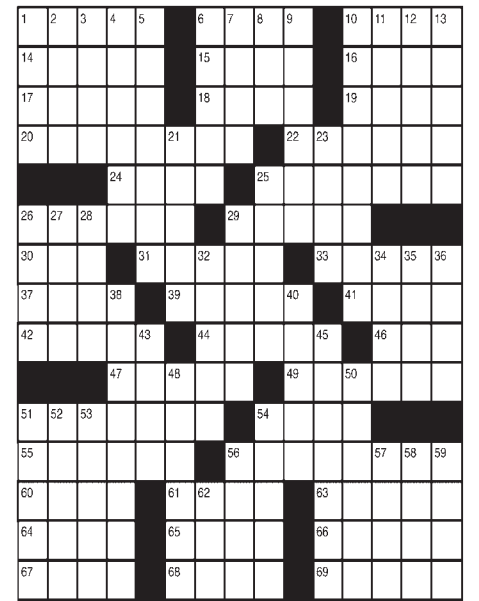
8	4	5	3	9	7	1	2	6
2	3	9	6	5	1	8	4	7
7	6	1	8	4	2	3	5	9
5	9	7	2	6	3	4	1	8
4	8	3	7	1	5	6	9	2
6	1	2	9	8	4	5	7	3
9	7	4	1	3	8	2	6	5
1	2	8	5	7	6	9	3	4
3	5	6	4	2	9	7	8	1

ACROSS

- Speak without preparation
- Fraudulent scheme
- Brief haircut
- Judd or Campbell
- Birthplace of Desi Arnaz
- Run fast
- Pitfalls
- Circle portions
- Suffix for an inflammation
- Obscene
- Laundry problems
- Membership payments
- Study of rocks
- Someone else named in a will
- Ne'er-do-well
- Abbr. in some addresses
- Stopwatch user
- Songs for two
- Bit of bacteria
- Rarin' to go
- Carpenter's fastener
- Mistake
- Disc jockey's medium
- FBI crime lab evidence
- Peace Prize
- Dusk
- Handbooks
- Give a party for
- Wellesley graduate, e.g.
- Sweet wine
- Athletic shoe brand
- Uttered
- Make amends
- Baker's need
- Powdered drink
- Transmits
- Take a break
- Wise man
- Lovers' meeting

Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews

12/14/15



Saturday's Puzzle Solved

DOA	EBBED	BOSH
OURS	LEAVE	INTO
ETCH	ANDES	SLOB
SHARPNESS	TYPO	
ROSY	EAR	
UPSIDE	TURN	OVER
REINS	TASTY	ARE
BANG	ROPES	ASAN
ACE	JAMES	CREST
NEWCOMER	SASSES	
REP	VANE	
CUBA	ACCIDENTS	
ANOD	RULED	ARTS
ITAL	TRAWL	LIAR
NOSE	SENSE	MRS

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12/14/15

- Washington ___; obelisk in D.C.
- Cooks in the microwave
- Hot ___ sundae
- Actress ___-Na Wen
- Curtis or Danza
- Conclusions
- In case
- Battery size

DOWN

- Prefix for social or histamine
- Bench board

AP EXPLAINS: What are my options for mobile pay?

Continued from Page 23

With Apple, Samsung and Android Pay, you're assigned a substitute card number unique to the phone. The store gets this number, so if its system gets hacked, your main card number isn't compromised.

To work, the substitute number must be paired with a one-time code generated by that device. Hackers getting that number will also need physical possession of your phone.

Other services have different security methods.

Wal-Mart, for example, says no card information is stored on the phone, but the real card number is still stored at what it says is a

secure data center. But if that center gets hacked, your real number might get compromised.

Wal-Mart's app is hooked up to your debit or credit card. The Starbucks app is more like refilling a gift card, and the company doesn't store your card data.

HOW EXACTLY DO THEY WORK?

There are two main ways mobile wallets work in stores: by using wireless technology called NFC or by scanning a QR or other code.

Mobile-payment services from Apple, Google and Samsung all rely on NFC. After entering banking or credit card information to set up the service, the

customer merely taps the phone next to a payment machine at the store and authorizes the purchase, usually with a fingerprint ID. But it works only in stores with newer, NFC equipment.

Samsung offers a backup: The phone can mimic the old-school magnetic signals produced by card swipes and work with most existing equipment. The CurrentC system and Wal-Mart's new mobile payment system use QR codes.

For the Wal-Mart system, shoppers open up the app and then they activate the camera function to scan a QR code on the reader. That connects the phone to the basket of items they're checking out. □

Classifieds

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Week	room	price
wk 38	room 529	\$4,750
wk 40	room 336	\$3,750
wk 40	room 105	\$5,000
wk 42	room 338	\$4,000
wk 43	room 329	\$3,250
wk 49	room 144	\$5,500
wk 50	room 546	\$6,000
wk 49	room 2571	\$3,750
wk 48	room 517	\$3,750
wk 48 or 49	room 119	\$4,750
wk 48 or 49	room 551	\$5,500
wk 49 or 50	room 203	\$5,500
wk 21 or 22	room 347	\$4,000
wk 51	room 347	\$12,500

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Rare elephant species found in war-torn South Sudan



In this photo released Friday, Dec. 11, 2015, a rare African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) is seen by a remote-sensing camera, in Western Equatoria State, South Sudan.

(Fauna & Flora International via AP)

JASON PATINKIN
Associated Press

JUBA, South Sudan (AP) — A critically endangered elephant species has been photographed by researchers for the first time

in South Sudan, significantly expanding the known range of the animal. But even in these remote central African forests, it faces threats from illegal logging and from war.

Smaller than savannah elephants, the forest elephants roam tropical forests and were photographed by cameras tied to trees in Western Equatoria state, a lush area near Congo and

the Central African Republic.

"This is by far the most northerly herd of forest elephants that anyone has seen in Africa," Adrian Garside, co-leader of the study by Fauna & Flora International, told Associated Press.

Forest elephant populations declined by 60 percent between 2002 and 2011, while losing 30 percent of their range in West and Central Africa, according to a 2013 study published in scientific journal PLOS ONE.

The forest elephant has straighter tusks than its cousins and more rounded ears and head.

The remotely activated cameras, set up over 3,000 square miles (7,770 sq. kilometers) of the state, also captured images of African golden cat, red river hog, giant pangolin, and water chevrotain, which is like a small deer, all previously unrecorded in South Sudan, the group said.

Over six months, the cameras captured more than 20,000 wildlife images. Chimpanzee, leopard, hyena, and bongo antelope

were also spotted.

"We are proving that there are expanses of habitat that is sort of pristine and unexplored, which is a very hopeful sign," Garside said.

In other countries, forest elephants are under intense poaching pressure, said DeeAnn Reeder, co-leader of the new study and a biology professor at Pennsylvania's Bucknell University.

She said the greater threat in Western Equatoria is habitat loss.

"There's illegal logging happening in Western Equatoria now, and it's pretty much unchecked," Reeder said.

South Sudan's war has led to more poaching of elephants for meat and ivory. Over 50 percent of elephants in South Sudan fitted with radio tracking collars before the war have been poached since fighting broke out two years ago, Paul Elkan of the Wildlife Conservation Society told AP.

Western Equatoria was mostly peaceful during the conflict but skirmishes broke out there between rebels and army this week. □

Scientists hope court setback doesn't stop giant telescope

JENNIFER KELLEHER
Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Scientists involved in Hawaii astronomy have a message for the builders of a giant telescope planned for a mountain held sacred by Native Hawaiians: Hang in there.

The state Supreme Court recently invalidated the \$1.4 billion project's permit to build on conservation land near the summit of Mauna Kea. The court sent

the matter back for a new contested case hearing, which could delay construction by several years. The nonprofit company building the Thirty Meter Telescope hasn't indicated what it will do next. Protesters say they will continue to fight the telescope at every step if officials pursue a new hearing. If the project dies, not only will that be bad for Hawaii astronomy, but for any high-tech industry considering Hawaii, said Paul

Coleman, an astrophysicist at the University of Hawaii's Institute for Astronomy.

"If it's not possible to get around this, then it really kind of shines a bad light on Hawaii," he said. "This will be a global disappointment. I would think it would be very hard for a new project to come here, ever."

A group of universities in California and Canada plan to build the telescope with partners from China, India and Japan. Cole-

man said he's hopeful the countries involved "feel this is a project worth hanging on for." After all, astronomers are accustomed to long delays. "One project I was involved in took me five years to get data," Coleman said of various weather and technical issues. "We're kind of used to showing up and not doing what we want to do."

Coleman, who is Native Hawaiian, may never get to use to the telescope if

it's built, he said. But a fellow Native Hawaiian in the field, who recently earned her doctorate from the University of Hawaii, could.

"I still think the project is a good project and there's a way we can move forward balancing cultural aspects as well as scientific advancement," said Heather Kaluna, who is the first Native Hawaiian to earn a doctorate in astronomy from the University of Hawaii. □

Gaga, Missy Elliott in tears after getting Billboard honors



Billboard "Woman of the Year" honoree Lady Gaga poses with singer Tony Bennett at the 2015 Billboard Women in Music honors at Cipriani 42nd Street on Friday, Dec. 11, 2015, in New York. (Photo by Evan Agostini/Invision/AP)

MESFIN FEKADU
AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Lady Gaga and Missy Elliott were in tears Friday as they discussed the struggles they faced in their careers at an event honoring women in the music industry.

Gaga was named Billboard's woman of the year, while Elliott — who has largely stayed out of the spotlight in recent years, save for a surprise Super Bowl appearance, but returned last month with a new single — was dubbed innovator of the year.

Loretta Lynn, Demi Lovato, Selena Gomez, Britney Howard of Alabama Shakes, Lana Del Rey, girl group Fifth Harmony, pop singer Tori Kelly and country singer Kelsea Ballerini were also honored at the event, along with 50 female music executives.

The Billboard Women In Music event, which included guests like Alicia Keys, Paul Rudd, Martina McBride and Jussie Smollett from "Empire," will air Dec. 18 on Lifetime.

Gaga — who earned a Grammy nomination Monday and a Golden Globe nod on Thursday — grew emotional onstage when she spoke about her struggles to find her voice in the industry.

"It's really hard sometimes for women in music. It's like a (expletive) boys club we can't get into. Sorry grandma," she said. "I've tried for so long. I just wanted to be taken seriously as a musician."

Gaga was introduced to the stage by her mother, Cynthia Germanotta, who said piano lessons as a child helped the pop star discover her gift for music. The singer ended her speech with strong words for those who doubted her in the past: "But I can write songs and I can sing."

Elliott, too, was emotional in a 6-minute speech that earned a standing ovation louder than any other Friday afternoon. The rapper, who recently returned with the single "WTF (Where They From)" after years away from the spotlight, cried

throughout her speech.

"I was that kid that used to write on my mother's walls ... I just had songs written all over the walls ... (and) as time went on I realized I was different and unique and not a follower," she said. "I've had my ups and downs, there's times I've wanted to give up, but God had another plan for me and if it had not been for him, I would not be standing here."

She went on to thank Janet Jackson for being a dependable friend and also paid tribute to her late friend, R&B singer Aaliyah. "And Aaliyah I hope you're looking down and proud of me," she said.

Billboard's event also gave the leading ladies a chance to celebrate their

Grammy nominations, which were announced Monday. And while Gaga earned a Grammy nod for best song written for visual media for "Til It Happens To You" — from the sexual assault documentary "The Hunting Ground" — she was also rejoicing because of her Golden Globe nomination for acting.

"It feels great because I really care about my work as an actress and I spend a lot of time on it and you never know if people can see that or if they just think, 'You're a musician who wants to do everything,' and that's not me at all," said Gaga, whose role on FX's "American Horror Story: Hotel" earned her a nomination for best actress in a miniseries or motion picture made

for television. "I love acting and I put so much of myself into it when I'm working, so to be recognized is so amazing."

Alabama Shakes earned four Grammy nominations, including album of the year and best alternative music album for "Sound & Color" as well as best rock performance and rock song for "Don't Wanna Fight."

"I hope I can be like Adele," band leader Howard said, holding her arms like Adele did when she won six Grammys in 2012. "Cradle all my babies."

Kelly, who released her debut album this year, is competing for best new artist.

"It's honestly the craziest thing to me. This is by far the craziest year of my life," she said. □



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8:00 PM



Wednesday
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Sunday
Local Talent Show by ANNIA
8:00 PM



Thursday
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With 'Force Awakens' looming, 'Heart of the Sea' sinks

JAKE COYLE

Associated Press

NEW YORK - The movie industry braced for the coming storm of "The Force Awakens" in a quiet weekend at the box office where "The Hunger Games: Mockingjay, Part 2" notched its fourth-straight week atop the box office and Ron Howard's whaling tale "In the Heart of the Sea" capsized.

With "The Force Awakens" lurking, few studios wanted to push out a new release ahead of the expected box-office behemoth. That left the final chapter of Lionsgate's "Hunger Games" saga to remain No. 1 with \$11.3 million according to studio estimates Sunday, bringing its domestic total to \$245 million. "In the Heart of the Sea," starring Chris Hemsworth, was the only major new wide release to test the pre-"Star Wars" waters. But hopes for the Warner Bros.



This photo shows Chris Hemsworth as Owen Chase in a scene from the film, "In the Heart of the Sea."
(Jonathan Prime/Warner Bros. Pictures via AP)

film sank with an estimated \$11 million despite a production budget around \$100 million. "Ron Howard is an accomplished, terrific filmmaker who took this ambitious project on as a real passion, and we're proud to have made it with him," said Jeff Goldstein, domestic distribution head for Warner Bros.

Though Goldstein acknowl-

edged it was a disappointing start, he hopes that "In the Heart of the Sea" - about the shipwreck of the Essex, which inspired Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick" - will benefit over the Christmas holiday by getting out ahead of "The Force Awakens," which opens Thursday night.

"There's a cultural phenomenon around the cor-

ner," Goldstein said. "Our hope was to get in in front of it and get some word of mouth so that when you get down to Christmas week — we leapfrog over this coming week — that you can break through the clutter of those other new movies."

In limited release, Adam McKay's comic rendering of the economic collapse, "The Big Short," opened strongly with \$720,000 in eight theatres. The Paramount Pictures release came into the weekend riding good reviews and a wave of nominations from the Screen Actors Guild and the Golden Globes, where it landed four nods including best picture, comedy, as well as nominations for stars Steve Carell and Christian Bale.

Rob Moore, vice chairman of Paramount, credited McKay for bringing a wry sense of humour to the Michael Lewis adaptation,

and creating a movie both powerful and commercial. The strong response to "The Big Short" also vindicated Paramount's decision — made after early screenings of the film — to move the film, which opens wide on Dec. 23, into awards season from its planned release in 2016.

"We thought that we had something really special," Moore said. "The last week with all the critical attention and audience reaction has certainly proved that out." The low-key weekend allowed Pixar's "The Good Dinosaur" to take third place with \$10.5 million in its third week. Ryan Coogler's acclaimed "Rocky" sequel "Creed" followed close behind with \$10.1 million in its third week. Slowly expanding Oscar contenders "Spotlight" and "Brooklyn" — both in their sixth week — continued to crack the top 10 with \$2.5 million and \$2 million, respectively. □

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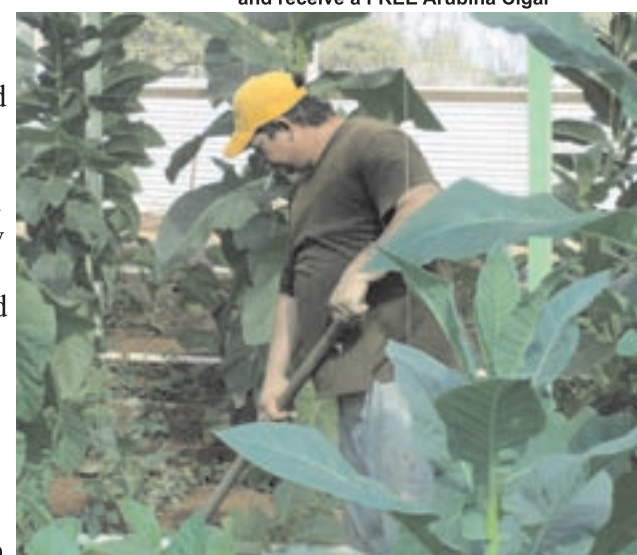
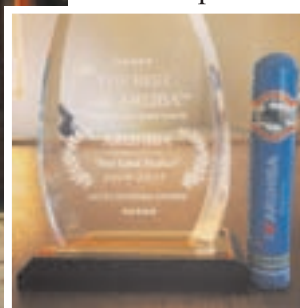


ORANJESTAD- Benjamin Petrocchi, a true native Aruban started the newest export product of Aruba, locally produced hand rolled cigars called "Aruhiba". These cigars are produced and cultivated in Aruba. Petrocchi always had a interest in the cigar business and has also sold Premium Cuban Cigars, and now he is growing his own tobacco crops. After many attempts and trips to Santo Domingo and Cuba, he started his own production and cultivation of Aruhiba Cigars in Aruba. The whole process took him 10 years to perfect. Petrocchi dedication to the cigars is important for the moulding and process of making a perfect cigar which takes a long time. Their handmade cigar box is specially designed with their "Aruhiba" logo. Petrocchi considers

Aruhiba as a promotion for Aruba through its fine cigars. The company sells Aruhiba to the international markets as well. Visit their retail store located in front of the Historic Dutch Windmill in front of the RIO Hotel, with any purchase of \$20 and up you receive a free "Aruhiba" cigar or ask for their gift box of 5 cigars get 1 FREE for only \$37. They open from Monday to Saturday from 9 am till 6:30 pm and on Sundays from 10 am to 4 pm. Aruhiba cigars are now available at the gift stores in your resort and at well-known cigar stores. For their complete selection and attractive by the box prices visit their retail store. Tours are also

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Owner Benjamin Petrocchi

POP LIFE

Swift to release concert tour only on Apple Music

NEW YORK (AP) — Taylor Swift is releasing a live concert special from her star-studded "1989 World Tour" exclusively on Apple Music. The pop star announced Sunday, on her 26th birthday, that she will release the "The 1989 World Tour LIVE" on the streaming platform on Dec. 20. It will not be available for purchase, but it is free for streaming for Apple Music users. The concert features Swift's performance taped in Sydney, Australia. It will also include special appearances from Justin Timberlake, Mick Jagger, Kobe Bryant and others. Apple Music is currently the only platform streaming Swift's "1989." Swift, who wrote a critical Tumblr post in June about Apple's initial decision to not pay artists during its free trial launch of Apple Music, said Apple contacted her about capturing one of her concerts. □

The Weeknd, Nick Jonas, Lovato shine at Jingle Ball show

NEW YORK (AP) — The Weeknd celebrated his breakout year from critical darling to full-blown pop star at iHeartRadio's "Jingle Ball" concert in New York City. The Grammy-nominated singer headlined Friday at Madison Square Garden, and even left out expletives during his set of songs, which was explosive and energetic. He sang familiar radio hits like "Can't Feel My Face" and "The Hills" in front of the feverish crowd, as did Nick Jonas, Selena Gomez, Charlie Puth, Fifth Harmony and Shawn Mendes. Demi Lovato was a vocal powerhouse in front of the loud audience and offered words of encouragement to the young fans. Other performers included 5 Seconds of Summer, Hailie Steinfeld, Calvin Harris and Zedd. Fetty Wap performed his hit "Trap Queen" and silenced the audience when he ended his set with an expletive. □

Can 'The Force Awakens' become the biggest movie ever?

RYAN NAKASHIMA
AP Business Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Riding galaxy-sized expectations, the new "Star Wars" movie opening Friday is setting records for pre-opening ticket sales. But does that mean the movie is destined to be the biggest of all time? Though several signs point in that direction, the outcome isn't guaranteed. The movie is on track to have the biggest December opening ever, topping "The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey," which took in \$85 million in the U.S. and Canada on its opening weekend in December 2012.

Ticket seller Fandango says advance ticket sales for "Star Wars: Episode VII — The Force Awakens" has already topped every other movie and Imax says it has sold double the previous record. Imax receipts account for a third of pre-release sales for this movie. Whether it bests the biggest grosser of all time — "Avatar," with \$2.8 billion worldwide — depends on word of mouth and whether fans love it enough to watch it multiple times through the new year.

"Star Wars" will have the advantage of having weak competition for months. Marvel's "Deadpool" doesn't come out until mid-February, while Warner Bros.' "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice" isn't out until late March.

"I think it's going to own January," said Erik Davis, managing editor of Fandango, one of the nation's largest online ticket retailers. "I know one guy who has nine tickets to see it in the first week alone. That's what we're talking about." A single ticket in big cities

can cost \$25 or more after paying for extras like Imax and 3-D.

Social media activity is also off the charts, according to entertainment news website Moviepilot Inc.

Exactly a month from re-

ing content," Moviepilot CEO Tobi Bauckhage said. "That's a very strong signal." To be sure, December releases tend to be smaller than in the summer, so coming out on top may take a marathon rather

of "The Hunger Games" was the leader in advance sales, but topped out at a worldwide gross of \$693 million, not even in the all-time Top 10.

What "The Force Awakens" benefits from, however,



This photo provided by Disney/Lucasfilm shows a scene from the new film, "Star Wars: The Force Awakens." The movie releases in U.S. theaters on Dec. 18, 2015.

(Film Frame/Disney/Lucasfilm via AP)

lease, "The Force Awakens" had 405 million trailer and teaser views on Facebook and YouTube. That's 87 percent more than this summer's "Jurassic World," which opened domestically with a record \$208.8 million in ticket sales and owns the all-time No. 3 spot with \$1.7 billion worldwide. No. 2 is "Titanic," at \$2.1 billion.

What's more, the 178,000 weekly searches for the movie on Google is more than three times as high as "Jurassic World," which had 51,800 weekly searches a month from release, according to Moviepilot.

"People are searching and craving and demand-

than a sprint.

As for the all-time high, one thing "Avatar" had going for it: It rode a wave of consumer interest in 3-D, which costs a few dollars more than regular tickets. That frenzy has largely cooled off. Traditionalists with a nostalgia for the originals might prefer 2-D screenings, especially with director J.J. Abrams' use of more realistic-looking special effects like puppetry.

The Walt Disney Co., which owns "Star Wars" maker Lucasfilm, declined to comment.

Advance sales don't always equate to record grosses. The first installment

is interest that now spans multiple generations. The movie also has a much bigger Chinese box office to tap. "Avatar" pulled down a monstrous \$204 million in China through 2010, but the theatrical market there is now at least three times as big. The big unknown is that no one's actually seen the movie yet.

It could make the difference between the so-so reaction to the "Star Wars" prequels in Episodes 1 to 3 — with heavily parodied characters like Jar Jar Binks and video-game-like action scenes — and the satisfying revival that fans are hoping for. □

Rushdie receives Mailer Prize for lifetime achievement

HILLEL ITALIE
AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Salman Rushdie is this year's recipient of the Mailer Prize for lifetime achievement.

The author of "Midnight's Children," "The Satanic Verses" and other novels was presented his award

by Laurie Anderson at a ceremony at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, the New York City borough where Norman Mailer was raised and lived off and on until his death in 2007.

"It's kind of great to be standing here in Norman Mailer's shadow," Rushdie

said. Rushdie, like Mailer, is a former president of the American chapter of PEN, the literary and human rights organization. He said Mailer had inspired him to help found the PEN World Voices Festival, an annual gathering of writers from around the world.

The 68-year-old Rushdie first encountered Mailer in the mid-1980s, when Mailer organized a famously contentious PEN congress. Rushdie said he remembered "how badly everybody behaved" and "how wonderful it was to see writers in the raw." □

Syrian refugee family embraces Christmas spirit in Germany

KIRSTEN GRIESHABER

Associated Press

ZWICKAU, Germany (AP)

— Christmas carols sound in the medieval square, and the scents of hot spiced wine, anise cookies and beeswax candles waft through the air at Zwickau's traditional Christmas market.

The four children of the Habashieh family, Muslim refugees from Syria, wander from stand to stand, looking with big eyes at all the mouthwatering delicacies. While Christmas is outside of their faith, they are filled with joy to be taking part in local traditions, especially since they now have their own home.

Only weeks ago, Khawla Kareem, the matriarch, was so desperate about life in Germany that she said she would rather brave the bombs in Damascus than spend another day in a cramped shelter with no privacy, no school for her children and fear of racist attacks.

Today, she couldn't be happier: Following months in a succession of squalid asylum centers, German authorities found them an empty apartment where they could live with modest dignity. The family has joined in the Christmas spirit of their neighbors, decorating the door of their flat with glittery red bells and tree branches in green and gold.

"We're fully integrated now," Reem Habashieh, the family's oldest daughter, jokes. Her little sister Raghad, 11, even has a toy Christmas calendar like most German kids, where each date is a door that opens to reveal chocolate in the countdown to Christmas eve. There's no question of the Habashiehs changing religion — this is just a way to build bridges and fit into a new community. The Habashiehs' journey has been one of hardship and heartbreak: braving choppy Mediterranean waters in a dinghy to Greece; trekking through Balkan corn-fields with no water in scorching heat; jumping across

barbed wire in fear of Hungarian border police; paying Romanian smugglers thousands of euros (dollars) to take them to Berlin in a minibus; spending countless sleepless nights in asylum centers with unspeakably filthy toilets.

a ride on a merry-go-round, beaming as she sits on a yellow elephant, its blue-greenish eyes blinking into the winter evening.

Then, giggling and teasing each other, the four children begin to make wishes to Santa Claus for a lark.

man class.

Khawla Kareem says it's difficult going back to school after so many years of being a teacher in Syria herself. But the kids are thriving. Reem has taken on the role of teacher's assistant, helping to translate instructions

are foreigners. Among those, Vietnamese and Russians, who moved to the east German town during communist times, comprise the two biggest groups. There are only 130 Syrians in Zwickau. That explains why a clerk at city hall reg-



Syrian refugees Reem Habashieh, Raghad Habashieh, Yaman Habashieh and Mohammed Habashieh, from left to right, visit the Christmas market in Zwickau, eastern Germany. The Muslim family with their mother Khawla Kareem has joined in the Christmas spirit of their neighbors, decorating the door of their flat with glittery red bells and tree branches in green and gold.

(AP Photo/Jens Meyer)

It all now feels like a bad dream. Now they are living a new German dream which is playing out to the tune of Yuletide cheer. At the Christmasmart, there's a long line in front of a stand with Dresden yeast bread which looks tempting, with its melted cheese and sour cream topping. But once the children discover it contains tiny bits of bacon — definitely not halal — they opt instead for a vendor selling gingerbread hearts, glazed apples and cotton candy.

Yaman, 15, orders a bag of candied almonds in the German he is quickly sponging up — and the children begin munching away at the warm, sugary nuts. Little Raghad goes for

"If I could make a wish," says 19-year-old Reem, "I'd really love to go to university soon."

"I wish and pray for peace in Syria," says 18-year-old Mohammed, taking a drag on his cigarette.

Raghad's wish is the same as countless German 11-year-olds: "I'd like a Barbie doll." These happy mornings, Khawla Kareem gets up before dawn, makes herself a strong Arabic coffee and listens to the tunes of Lebanese star Fairuz just like she did in Damascus — explaining that the start to her day would be incomplete without the legendary singer's voice.

She then wakes up her children, and they all walk together to their nearby Ger-

from English into Arabic for other refugee students.

Not all asylum-seekers have been as fortunate as the Habashiehs. The majority of the nearly 1 million migrants who have registered for asylum in Germany so far this year are still stuck in overcrowded reception centers, waiting for months to have their requests processed. Scuffles between different ethnic groups are increasingly common. And there are growing concerns about abuse of women and children in the camps by fellow refugees, security staff, or predators pretending to be volunteers to get inside the shelters.

Only about 3,000 — a little over 2 percent — of Zwickau's population of 90,000

istered the Habashiehs as having no religious affiliation: "Sorry, Islam does not exist in our computer system," he told the family. Despite the hardships, the Habashiehs were overjoyed when they learned of their latest turn of fortune: They will have their asylum interview on December 22, three days before Christmas. "We have high hopes that we will receive refugee status soon," says Reem. Almost all Syrian asylum-seekers get German residency for between one to three years after their interviews. Once they are legally accepted as refugees, the family will be allowed to leave the town of Zwickau and move around freely in the country. □